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**Análise das necessidades linguísticas, em Inglês
dos recepcionistas de hotel.**



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**An ESP approach to the linguistic needs of the hotel
receptionists in Portugal**

dissertação apresentada à Universidade de Aveiro para cumprimento dos requisitos necessários à obtenção do grau de Mestre em Estudos Ingleses, realizada sob a orientação científica da Professora Doutora Maria Teresa Costa Gomes Roberto, Professora Auxiliar do Departamento de Línguas e Culturas da Universidade de Aveiro.

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Palavra chave

Needs analysis, soft skills, ESP.

resumo

Inglês para Fins Específicos (IFE) tornou-se uma disciplina muito popular nos últimos anos. Vários projectos têm revelado que o interesse do IFE tem vindo a aumentar e o número de pessoas que estudam esta disciplina também tem crescido, por todo o mundo. Esta dissertação dedica-se ao estudo do Inglês para recepcionistas de hotel, em Portugal. Isto é, esta dissertação apresenta os resultados de uma investigação das necessidades linguísticas em Inglês dos recepcionistas, em vários hotéis portugueses. O uso de instrumentos de levantamento de dados quantitativos, como um questionário estruturado a ser preenchido pelos participantes, uma análise de materiais autênticos, entrevistas e visitas ao local de trabalho, contribuíram para a obtenção de informação sobre a comunicação entre os recepcionistas, os clientes e outros intervenientes, nos vários hotéis Portugueses. Esta informação detalhada foi usada para apoiar sugestões, para um curso que possa atender às necessidades específicas da profissão em questão. As respostas obtidas nas entrevistas foram elucidativas e os resultados da análise de necessidades linguísticas, em Inglês, foram cuidadosamente consideradas.

Key words

Needs analysis, soft skills, ESP.

abstract

English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has become a very popular subject in the recent years. Research has discovered that ESP is a necessary and advantageous field, with ever more people studying it around the world. The focus of this dissertation is on English for the hotel receptionists. That is, this work reports on research into the workplace English needs of Portuguese receptionists in various hotels. Through a quantitative approach of using a self-completion, structured questionnaire, analysis of authentic materials, interviews and visits to the workplace, a detailed understanding has been obtained about the communication between the receptionists, guests and other entities in the various Portuguese hotels. This in-depth knowledge was used to give suggestions for designing a course that attempts to respond to specific workplace needs. The answers obtained through the interviews were elucidative and the findings of the linguistic needs analysis were considered carefully.

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acronyms and definitions

BE	- Business English
EAP	- English for Academic Purposes
EBP	- English for Business Purposes
EEP	- English for Educational Purposes
EGAP	- English for General Academic Purposes
EGBP	- English for General Business Purposes
ELT	- English Language Teaching
EOP	- English for occupational Purposes
ESAP	- English for Specific Business Purposes
ESOL	- English for Speakers of Other Languages
ESP	- English for Specific Purposes
IFE	- Inglês para Fins Específicos
L1	- First Language
L2	- Second Language
LANA	- Language Needs Analysis
LSA	- Learning Situation Analysis
LSP	- Language (S) for Specific Purposes (S)
NA	- Needs Analysis
NNS	- Non Native Speaker
NS	- Native Speaker
PSA	- Present Situation Analysis
TEFL	- Teaching English as Foreign Language
TESL	- Teaching English as a Second Language
TSA	- Target Situation Analysis

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CHAPTER 1

JUSTIFICATION FOR THE STUDY

The title of my dissertation is “An ESP approach to the linguistic needs of the hotel receptionists in Portugal”. The reasons why I chose this subject were mainly:

- 1- Although designers and teachers of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) are familiar with the linguistic needs of personnel in the hotel and catering industry, there isn't much research done on possible *novel situations* in English that can take place in the hotel's reception (e.g. dealing with offensive language). I therefore wanted to obtain a far deeper understanding of the day-to-day activities performed in English by the hotel receptionists in Portugal.
- 2- Not only did I want to analyse the extent to which receptionists use English for performing the various tasks and how confident they feel in doing so, but also I was interested in knowing how capable they are in applying their *soft skills* in English, especially in delicate situations such as handling conflict.
- 3- I intended to explore more deeply the obstacles that are likely to limit the intercultural communication and lead to misunderstanding among hotel receptionists, guests and the community to which they belong. This is of great relevance for the construction of knowledge in the field of English studies.
- 4- Another reason which prompted this study was the belief that, as a result of recent technological developments in the sending and receiving of messages, there was a need to update communication for the existing programmes. For instance, fax and e-mail have become very popular for sending messages in English by Portuguese hotel receptionists. However, guidance and practice in the use of these relatively new channels of communication is sometimes limited.

- 5- An additional reason for this study was that the hotel industry is an important contributor to the Portuguese economy and has been a significant employer within the tourism sector. Given the importance of the industry to the Portuguese economy, and the increasingly competitive and changing demands of the global marketplace, it is essential that the Portuguese hotels 'keep their guests happy'. Obviously, this can be ensured by providing quality products at competitive prices. A more subtle, though equally important means, is through efficient, rapid, responsible and effective communication. Hence, English plays an important role in the communicative situations that take place in the Portuguese hotels.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ARE TO

- 1- find out which, how and when English is used by the Portuguese receptionists.
- 2- explore the extent to which receptionists feel confident when using English in the various tasks performed at work.
- 3- discover which English language and other essential skills are lacking and need attention.
- 4- understand why and when language is misunderstood or inappropriately used.
- 5- critically analyse the existing materials, which aim at providing the English needed by the Hotel receptionists.
- 6- reach a precise comparison between those existing materials and the actual linguistic needs, wants and lacks of my respondents.
- 7- finally, my work has the objective of adding valid suggestions regarding the programmes and methodology in designing ESP courses for hotel receptionists. That is, to deal with the most sensitive aspects of language use in the hotel's reception, the receptionists' language 'gaps' and their weaknesses with regards to interpersonal as well as intercultural communication skills.

STRUCTURE OF THE STUDY

This work is divided into seven chapters. This first chapter includes the summary of the research and refers to the various concerns that arise from the research process.

In the second chapter, I review and critically analyse the existing literature on English for Specific Purposes (ESP) more specifically English for receptionists. Hence, I present an overview of the growth of ESP and the related developments in linguistics. I also describe the teaching of ESP and contrast that with General English. The third chapter explores needs analysis and how this action comes to bear on the language teaching for hotel receptionists. The purpose of this chapter is to explain what is meant by needs, explore the different types of needs and to discuss the importance of the community's input in the appraisal of the communicative needs of Portuguese hotel receptionists. The fourth chapter describes the methodology used and refers to main questions used to investigate the language needs of Portuguese receptionists. The fifth chapter presents the results obtained followed by the detailed discussion of the main findings.

The sixth chapter contains aspects to be considered at the course design stage, including objectives and course content. Chapter seven contains suggestions regarding the making of materials needed to teach English to receptionists according to the language needs that were ascertained. Finally, I present a list of bibliography and appendixes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

I am interested in analysing the English language needs of Portuguese receptionists, in order to propose a course which will be able to give our target group the essential language skills that are used/needed in their daily profession. I must explore and attempt to use good teaching materials that can improve the language needs of Portuguese receptionists and propose effective activities and topics that focus on teaching English for this specific purpose, while taking into consideration the main contexts of language use.

To proceed with my analysis of the linguistic needs of the Portuguese receptionists with the purpose of suggesting effective instructions and practices for an ESP course, it was necessary to gather information relevant to this topic from various sources.

I have critically analysed the work on the spread of English mainly by David Crystal (1997) and in particular, Hutchinson and Waters (1987), which have explored the development of ESP.

This study also includes the work of Mackay and Mountford (1978) who attempted to describe ESP, Halliday (1978) who defined register, or context of situation which led on to the tradition of "register analysis" by Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998). Equally important is the work of David Carter (1983), who identified three types of ESP and explored the characteristics of ESP courses.

To explore and try to understand what is meant by needs and needs analysis, I have mainly included the work of Richterich and Chancerel (1987), of John (1991) and Hutchinson and Waters (1993).

It was necessary to include literature specifically on English for the receptionists. Nonetheless, I was somehow surprised to find that the existing literature is too broad. That is, although we find many books on English for international tourism and for the hotel staff, including catering and receptionists, I could not find ESP orientation or course-books which cater specifically for receptionists. In other words, the books available are designed to meet the needs of learners who want a career in the tourism/hotel trade or who already work in this sector, but none of these books is made for a particular purpose or use - designed specifically for receptionists.

METHODS USED

Questionnaires, follow-up interviews, collection of authentic workplace texts, and visits to the workplace all form part of the data. The main instrument of research used in this study is the questionnaire, which I found to be the most suitable for the objectives of my study. The Methodological framework used for this study is discussed in more detail further on in chapter 5, on methodology.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED

It took me a great amount of time distributing all the questionnaires to the receptionists working in several different hotels throughout Portugal since I had to travel around the country. At times, I had to go to the same hotel twice, because the receptionists did not have the time to complete the questionnaires right away when I approached them for the first time.

Furthermore, it was impossible to see and collect texts such as written complaints and or received e-mails because hotel staff was concerned about the use to be made of material that could compromise their position, their client's privacy or their work methodology. These could have been of great help in understanding the type of English language used and the particularities in speech and writing, which receptionists need to use or respond to.

Despite all of the difficulties encountered, The information obtain from the interviews and questionnaires about every aspect of their English language ability and use (reading, writing, speaking, etc...) was satisfactory. Although we must take into account that my research sample cannot be generalised for the profession as a whole, the gained insights into the linguistic needs of Portuguese receptionists was of great help in achieving my research goal - a good framework of teaching strategies and materials that, I hope, will help to meet the requirements of hotel receptionists.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, I review existing literature and research on English for Specific Purposes, in particular, English for the hotel industry- receptionists. I critically discuss why ESP has become so popular, I will try to arrive at a close-to-reality definition of it and explore its characteristics. A lot of attention will be given to the linguistic needs of potential ESP students while taking into account the needs, which ESP can actually satisfy and some potential limitations.

THE SPREAD OF ENGLISH

According to Barbara Wallraff (2000), English has achieved some global status. Among other examples Barbara Wallraff stated that:

“ English is the official language of the European Central bank even though the bank is in Frankfurt and neither Britain or any other predominantly English-speaking country is a member of the European Monetary Union”. Barbara Wallraff (2000:26).

David Crystal (1997) has also analysed the spread of English and has stated that English is used in some countries as a mother language, in other societies as a second language and or a foreign- language taught in schools. The following facts demonstrate that English is indeed a dominant language and operates as a common medium for international communication:

- “English has the greatest number of speakers reaching as many as 1.5 billion people;
- English is designated an official language of as many as 62 nations;
- English is the most dominant language in scientific communication with 70-80 percent of academic publications being published in it;
- English is the *de facto* official and working language in most international organisations;
- English is the most taught foreign language across the world” (Ammon, 1992: 78-81).

ENGLISH AS THE INTERNATIONAL TOOL FOR COMMUNICATION

A recent comprehensive review of the history of the field of ESP (Dudley & St. John, 1998: 19-33) represents the expansion of English to become the pre-eminent language of world commerce and scholarship in the last half of the twentieth century as: "... a naturally occurring and inevitable occurrence" (Benesch, 2001: 25).

However, it is more sensible to explain the frequent use of English in terms of the desire for technological, commercial and cultural contact, the political or military power of an English-speaking country and the increased number of international students studying in the UK, USA and Australia (Dudley & ST. John, 1998: 19). Accordingly, David Crystal wrote:

“... a language becomes an international language for one chief reason: the political power of its people - specially their military power”. David Crystal (1997: 32)

As far as modernisation is concerned, English is at the centre of the growth of industry, communication technologies, broadcasting media, business and entertainment industries. Therefore, the need to learn English has become crucial, if one community has to talk so conveniently to another.

DEFINITION OF ESP

ESP is: “the teaching of English, not as an end in itself but as an essential means to a clearly identifiable goal” Mackay (1978:163). Examples include English for the hotel reception courses, where students learn the necessary language to carry out the various daily tasks, which comprise their job. In sum, ESP is English for vocational purposes, where the word vocation is used loosely to include education and all kinds of professional activity.

Nowadays, ESP could be defined as an approach used in teaching English for any purpose that can be specified. Still, this definition is not final nor untouched. Up to now,

researchers and authors dedicated to this topic could not generally agree on a single and unique definition of ESP. Although we can refer to it as the teaching of English used in academic studies or for professional purposes, the complete uniform definition is not yet reached because ESP is growing in different directions.

We know that different human activities require different communication skills and ESP has its focus on mastering specific linguistic items, and also takes into account time constraints. Within this broad definition, we may identify two central areas: content and methodology. Content is concerned with how narrow or broad the scope of a particular course is, when compared with the totality of the language.

In English for specific purposes the course content and teaching methods are derived from an analysis of a specific language use situation. Hutchinson and Waters gave ESP a broad description as:

"... an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner's reason for learning" (Hutchinson and Waters 1987:19).

Hence, the key stage in any ESP course is needs analysis, which determine the course design, materials selection/production and the teaching methodology.

ESP AND THE COMPLEXITIES OF LANGUAGE LEARNING

It is difficult to come to an understanding as to the nature of ESP teaching unless one has an understanding of the complexity of language learning. There is an enormous variety of paths in life, each of which has its own language and cultural setting. We may divide these walks of life into two categories: those that are common to everybody and those that are concerned with specialised communicative situations familiar only to a few. Examples of those, amongst other walks of life which are common to many people are socialising, shopping, travelling, and reading newspapers. So, when one learns a language, one is exposed to linguistic items relating to these universal communicative situations and everyday needs. This is the task of a General English course. Yet in addition, there is a range of specialised communicative situations, which are of significant importance only to sections of the population. For example, a hotel's reception is a special communicative

situation in the sense that it requires a variety of English needed for particular tasks such as answering the telephone, with a specific purpose or set of purposes and subtasks like taking bookings.

Thus, each specific communicative situation will contain certain tasks, specific to it, which an individual will need to accomplish and which require him/her to use language. People who are engaged in different activities need to master different skills. It is desirable to define the fields of expertise more specifically so that the tasks carried out by these professionals can be defined precisely. In addition, each defined task should be divided into its various subtasks, so that the textual genres and wording to be learned may be identified more easily.

In order to acquire the desired competencies, language specific to each skill must be mastered. Each field will also have vocabulary which is special to it. Some of the words may have meanings specific to the field, different from their meanings in everyday life.

We also have another element that has a strong impact on the specific language needs of a particular domain, which is the register.

Register, or context of situation as it is formally termed, "is the set of meanings, the configuration of semantic patterns, that are typically drawn upon under the specific conditions, along with the words and structures that are used in the realisation of these meanings" (Halliday, 1978:23).

It includes the field, tenor and mode, which have a direct impact on the choice of language in speaking and writing Halliday (1978).

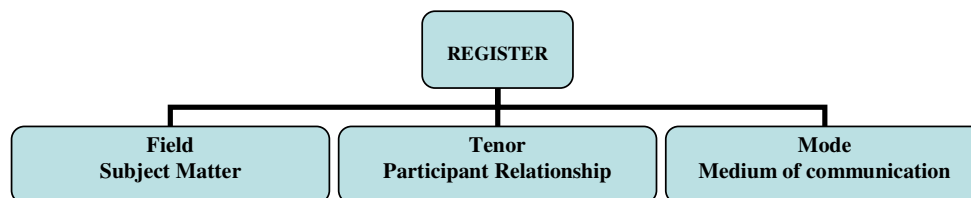
“Field, tenor and mode are not kinds of language use, nor are they simple components of the speech setting. They are a conceptual framework for representing the social context as the semiotic environment in which people exchange meanings.” (Halliday 78: 110)

Field refers to the topic of the text, which in turn, varies according to how much knowledge the receiver has. *Tenor*, refers to the type of relationship between the participants in a situation of communication. This interpersonal relationship is affected by three main aspects:

- 1- power (unequal/equal),
- 2- contact (infrequent/frequent) and
- 3- the affective involvement (low affective/high affective)

Accordingly, these three dimensions will determine the level of formality of the text. *Mode* refers to the use that is being made of language. All of these factors, field, tenor and mode, are decisive in the use that is made of language. For instance, the subject of a complaint about a dirty room that needs to be seen immediately is the field. This field varies according to changes in the subject matter. The complaint can be made in writing or face to face (*mode*) by a regular/new guest and or by someone of high/low status(*tenor*). Any changes in these factors will bring about alterations in the register

The following diagram illustrates more clearly the concept of register analysis:



TYPES OF ESP

English for Specific Purposes has come a long way since its origins. ESP, in its early age, was first known as EST (English for Science and Technology). The pioneers of this teaching approach revolted against traditional linguists who were busy describing the features of language; whereas the problem with language was to make it flexible to be used in all settings communicatively.

Today, the field covers all imaginable professions in which English is instrumental, from business and commerce to biological science (see appendix B: 'Tree of ELT'). This new perspective of the language could be seen as the only way to help facing the demands of a brave new professional world.

David Carter (1983) identifies three types of ESP:

- English as a restricted language
- English for Academic and Occupational Purposes
- English with specific topics.

The language used by air traffic controllers or by waiters are examples of English as a restricted language. Mackay and Mountford (1978) clearly illustrate the difference between restricted language and general language with this statement:

‘... the language of international air-traffic control could be regarded as 'special', in the sense that the repertoire required by the controller is strictly limited and can be accurately determined situationally, as might be the linguistic needs of a dining-room waiter or air-hostess’. Mackay and Mountford (1978: 4-5).

However, such restricted repertoires do not represent English language fully, just as a tourist phrase books do not include grammar. Knowing a restricted 'language' would not allow the speaker to communicate effectively in novel situations, or in contexts outside the vocational environment.

The second type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English for Academic and Occupational Purposes. In the 'Tree of ELT' (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987), ESP is broken down into three branches:

- a) English for Science and Technology (EST),
- b) English for Business and Economics (EBE), and
- c) English for Social Studies (ESS).

Each of these subject areas is further divided into two branches:

- (a) English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and
- (b) English for Occupational Purposes (EOP).

An example of EOP for the EST branch is 'English for Technicians' whereas an example of EAP for the EST branch is 'English for Medical Studies'. English for Academic Purposes (EAP) is implemented in educational institutions where students learn it for their academic studies (Kenedy and Bolitho, 1984).

As described above, ESP has had a relatively long time to mature and so we would expect the ESP community to have a clear idea about what ESP means. Strangely, however, this does not seem to be the case. For example, a very heated debate took place about whether or not English for Academic Purposes (EAP) could be considered part of ESP in general.

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) note that there is not a clear-cut distinction between EAP and EOP:

" ... people can work and study simultaneously; it is also likely that in many cases the language learnt for immediate use in a study environment will be used later when the student takes up, or returns to, a job" Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 16).

Perhaps this explains Carter's rationale for categorizing EAP and EOP under the same type of ESP. It appears that Carter is implying that the end purpose of both EAP and EOP are one and the same: employment. However, despite the end purpose being identical, the means taken to achieve the end is very different indeed.

In an EAP course, students are expected to acquire receptive and perceptive academic skills parallel to developing learning strategies and study skills (Jordan, 1997). Given the diversity and complexity of EAP objectives, it is crucial to conduct an in-depth needs assessment before planning and implementing an EAP curriculum and material (Johns, 1991; Robinson, 1991).

The third and final type of ESP identified by Carter (1983) is English with specific topics. Carter notes that it is only here where emphasis shifts from purpose to topic. This type of ESP is uniquely concerned with anticipated future English needs of, for example, scientists requiring English for postgraduate reading studies, attending conferences or working in foreign institutions.

However, I argue that this is not a separate type of ESP. Rather it is an integral component of ESP courses or programs which focus on situational language. This

situational language has been determined based on the interpretation of results from needs analysis of authentic language used in target workplace settings.

GROWTH OF ESP - ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

Notably, there are three reasons common to the emergence of ESP: the demands of a Brave New World, developments in linguistics and focus on the learner (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). First, the end of the Second World War brought with it:

" ... an age of enormous and unprecedented expansion in scientific, technical and economic activity on an international scale. For various reasons, most notably the economic power of the United States in the post-war world, the role [of international language] fell to English" Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 6).

Next, the Oil Crisis of the early 1970s resulted in Western money and knowledge flowing into the oil-rich countries. The language of this knowledge became English. The general effect of all this development was to exert pressure on the language teaching profession to deliver the required skills. Whereas,

“ English had previously decided its own destiny, it now became subject to the wishes, needs and demands of people other than language teachers” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987, 7).

As Benesch (2001) documents:

“...the "flower" of ESP was no wildflower whose seed happened to be blowing in the wind; rather it was consciously and firmly planted in the soil of an emergent post-colonial Anglo-American economic order”. Benesch (2001:53)

Accordingly, industrial, political and academic groups actively worked to implant English in the Middle East and throughout the developing world as the language of knowledge and commerce. Given that these forces exerted pressure on language teaching, ESP was perceived to be the most expeditious way of bringing out the desired effects, there was a considerable boom in teaching English with a professional bias.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF LINGUISTICS TO ESP

The second key reason cited as having a tremendous impact on the emergence of ESP was a revolution in linguistics. Whereas traditional linguistics set out to describe the features of language, development in linguistics began to focus on the ways in which language is used in real communication. Hutchinson and Waters (1987) point out that one significant discovery was in the ways that spoken and written English vary. In other words, given the particular context in which English is used, the variant of English will change. This idea was taken one step further. If language in different situations varies, then tailoring language instruction to meet the needs of learners in specific contexts is also possible and desirable. Since the 1960's, ESP practitioners' first task in any setting is to perform a linguistic "needs analysis"; and address authentic texts produced by experts for real-world purposes. ESP narrowed during the 1980s to accounts of particular linguistic or discursal features within specific disciplinary genres.

"Work in ESP was by the middle 80s, not merely interested in characterising linguistic *effects*; it was also concerned to seek out the determinants of those *effects*" (Swales, 1990: 4).

ESP, thus, came to be concerned with discourse as communication and interaction in a social context. It began to focus more extensively *on* text structure as a realisation of the writer's communicative purpose and less on morpho-syntactical elements of the sentence level.

Researchers' notion of *genre* expanded from an unproblematic "type of text" to include conventional purposes and aspects of social context associated with a given textual structure.

This mode of ESP research, associated with the tradition of "register analysis" (Dudley-Evans & St. John, 1998: 21), helps the practitioner identify and prioritise aspects of textual genres that students must master to be considered competent members of the discourse communities they aspire to join. Thus, work can be done successfully while English language plays an auxiliary role.

FOCUS ON THE LEARNER

The final reason Hutchinson and Waters (1987) cite as having influenced the emergence of ESP has less to do with linguistics and everything to do with psychology. Rather than simply focus on the method of language delivery, more attention was given to the ways in which learners acquire language. Learners were seen to employ different learning strategies, use different skills, enter with different learning schemata, and be motivated by different needs and interests. Therefore, the designer of a specific ESP course must aim to meet these individual needs. To this day, the catchword in ESP circles is learner-centered or learning-centered.

Throughout its history, psychology has provided vital information that can contribute directly to improvements in teaching, learning based on research on human learning, development, and motivation. Students who perceive a direct relationship between their needs, the English they are learning in ESP and the needs of their professional community show greater motivation than if they were learning in a more general English teaching environment. I will address this more fully in the chapter "needs analysis".

To sum up, general developments in the world economy, focus on the ways in which language is used and concern for the learners' needs contributed to the origins and growth of ESP, which from the early 1960's, has grown to become one of the most prominent areas of EFL (English as a foreign language) teaching today. Its development is

reflected in the increasing number of universities offering an MA in ESP and in the number of ESP courses offered to overseas students in English speaking countries. There has been a rapid growth of English courses aimed at specific disciplines. These will be discussed further on.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ESP COURSES

Carter (1983) states that there are three features common to ESP courses: a) authentic material, b) purpose-related orientation, and c) self-direction.

If we revisit Dudley-Evans' (1997) claim that ESP should be offered at an intermediate or advanced level (the learner is an adult or near adult), use of authentic learning materials is entirely desirable. The extent of the authenticity of the learning materials will vary depending upon two related factors: the language level of the trainees, and the degree of linguistic complexity of the skills presented and practised. If the language level is low, then perforce the degree of authenticity will be compromised. As the language level increases, the degree of authenticity becomes greater.

Purpose-related orientation refers to the simulation of communicative tasks required of the target setting. In order to successfully communicate in an occupational setting, one has to *use the particular vocabulary* characteristic of that specific occupational context and use the specific genres of the profession. Finally, self-direction is characteristic of ESP courses in that: " ... the point of including self-direction ... is that ESP is concerned with turning learners into users" (Carter, 1983:134). In order for self-direction to occur, the learners must have a certain degree of freedom to decide when, what, and how they will study. Carter (1983) also adds that there must be an attempt by teachers to teach the learners how to learn by teaching them about learning strategies.

Dudley-Evans (1997) who prefers to call ESP "*an attitude of mind*" has given an extended definition of ESP in terms of 'absolute' and 'variable' characteristics:

Absolute Characteristics:

1. ESP is defined to meet specific needs of the learners
2. ESP makes use of underlying methodology and activities of the discipline it serves

3. ESP is centered on the language appropriate to these activities in terms of grammar, lexis, register, study skills, discourse and genre.

Variable Characteristics:

1. ESP may be related to or designed for specific disciplines
2. ESP may use, in specific teaching situations, a different methodology from that of General English
3. ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners, either at a tertiary level institution or in a professional work situation. It could, however, be for learners at secondary school level.
4. ESP is generally designed for intermediate or advanced students.
5. Most ESP courses assume some basic knowledge of the language systems.

(Dudley-Evans&St. John, 1998:5)

These lists of characteristics may not help us reaching a complete compromising definition of ESP as they were subject to various points of view. However, it provides a set of guidelines that is uncontroversial and usable in practical situations. For, instance, designing a course for receptionists .

ESP AND GENERAL ENGLISH

One may ask 'What is the difference between the ESP and General English approach?' Hutchinson et al answer this quite simply, *"in theory nothing, in practice a great deal"* Hutchinson et al. (1987:53). ESP courses are usually contrasted with general English, in which purpose is more broadly defined such as “ pre- intermediate”. A student of ESP is usually studying in order to perform a role. Although it is important to note that all English language courses are developed for some purpose, ESP courses usually switch from very general to very specific. Put simply, a general English course, may be said to have a definite aim, namely to pass a certain examination. However, that final exam is likely to be more general than the course itself. It is necessary but sometimes not easy to draw the line between a specific and a general course.

Although both ESP and general English are concerned with communicative language ability, attention must be given to the fact that ESP values the importance of communicating or performing in English successfully in a specific **professional setting**. As Brumfit (1977) put it:

‘First, it is clear that an ESP course is directly concerned with the purposes for which learners need English, purposes which are usually expressed in functional terms...’ Brumfit (1977: 91)

With regards to content, general English courses deal with many different topics and skills at a more superficial level, giving equal treatment to each. Students learn about many things and relevant material. Due to the general nature of these courses, no needs analysis is conducted, and hence there can be no attempt to cater to specific learning needs of particular students. The following consequences are that upon completion of the course, students may not be prepared to function effectively in employment contexts.

On the contrary, ESP is based on knowing the goals of learners at all stages, hence the importance of permanently conducting learners' needs analysis. Attention to the *needs* of the learner is certainly a key element in any definition of ESP. However, the distinction between ESP and General English approach is not yet resolved.

In essence, the two aspects of ESP teaching and research that may be said to distinguish them from more general purpose English are: authenticity of task and the interaction between language knowledge and specific purpose content knowledge. Authenticity of task means that the ESP learning tasks should share critical features of tasks in the target language use situation of interest to the learners and that learners' language knowledge is engaged in responding to the communicative situation. In general, the student has some general English knowledge and now, wishes to extend or adapt this competence to his or her particular field of work or study.

ESP is progressively gaining new areas in EFL teaching. One day, perhaps, general English will be used only as a stepping stone to ESP as this is progressively used in all fields of study. As Micheal Long writes:

‘The number of people wanting to learn English for a specific purpose is spiralling . By and large these people have been students in tertiary education, and adults, Increasingly, however, attention is being given to the possibility of equipping secondary age students for their anticipated language needs in higher education and future employment.’ Micheal Long (1975:73).

It seems as though, general English will exist as a pre-ESP course. That is, one must acquire a reasonable knowledge of English in order to become focused on the English necessary for specific purposes.

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER AND SUBJECT KNOWLEDGE

What is important for the ESP teacher is to find the best ways to assess, understand and satisfy the students’ linguistic needs . They also need to raise such simple questions as “‘what it means to analyse the needs of a student? How can different needs of different students be satisfied in the same classroom? What are the needs which the teacher can or should care about? Which specific needs will come to prominence in the global world for e-communication, e-business, e-culture and e-civilisation? ”

It is now widely accepted that the ESP teacher should not be expected to be an expert in the students’ desired professional field. However, it has also been said that it falls within our professional requirements to be at least conversant in the subject. What happens in any teaching situation, as is common to many ESP situations, is that teachers obtain a considerable amount of information on students’ speciality.

Specific knowledge is to advantage, it should be handled carefully in the ESP classroom. To begin with, the ESP teacher should resist the temptation to act as an expert on the subject, for the common-sense reason that his/her knowledge, so often obtained with express purpose of supporting ESP teaching may result in the loss of face and possibly of confidence on the part of the students. Secondly, the teacher should avoid using highly

specialised materials, whose language and content s/he will find taxing in its use as teaching materials for his/her classes.

ENGLISH FOR THE HOTEL

To my knowledge there aren't any books for receptionists produced in Portugal. All the books are produced in England, which is a limitation in itself when considering the specificity of Portuguese as the student's mother tongue.

Like any other type of English for specific purposes, English books for the hotel are designed to meet the linguistic needs of the employees, mainly receptionists and the catering' staff. I have had the opportunity to read a considerable number of books published (see bibliography). These books are recommended and used in courses for younger adult learners on hotel and catering courses in schools and colleges, or people training for a career in a similar sector. Those manuals provide the English needed for dealing with customers and colleagues in a variety of hotel and restaurant situations, such as:

- Taking phone calls and bookings including dealing with difficult phone calls. The existing literature tends to suggest a structured way of answering the telephone, starting with greeting the customer, then asking who's calling and only then, taking the message. Hence, the receptionist is also taught how to ask for and give clarifications (i.e. spelling) and negotiate (i.e. giving discounts).
- Checking guests in and out include giving information about facilities and services. The receptionists are helped with the appropriate language and writing skills for filling in registration cards, writing e-mails, note taking, etc...
- Dealing with enquiries and complaints normally relating to room service. Language is provided for dealing with complaints. For instance, students learn to apologise and take action to help customers.
- Giving information, explanations and directions. Visual aids such as maps and prepositions of location and direction are presented for teaching the topic 'giving directions indoors and outdoors'.

- Taking payments is an inevitable topic in any English for the hotel course. Most books in the market give useful instructions for using the ‘*Computer’s Departures’ System*’.
- Applying for a job, which involves having to learn how to prepare a curriculum vitae, a covering letter and to understand job advertisements. Thus, learners are to practice writing and reading as well as responding in interviews.
- Offering help and advice is also one of the main situations of concern. The students usually listen to various situations of emergency in which examples of actions/solutions are proposed. Simulated situations are included

In general each situation or communicative area contains listening and reading exercises, role play activities, expressions and new words to be learned and grammar tips. In addition, at the end of most books we are likely to find a word list of the most common English words used in the hotel. The words are in alphabetical order and translated into French, German, Italian and Japanese. Finally, we have got access to listening scripts and answers to the various exercises.

I have formulated an opinion on the available text books for the field of receptionists and catering, which is presented in my ‘‘Application of findings chapter’’.

THE BENEFITS OF ENGLISH FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES

I have explored the insights of various theorists and their assumptions with regards to ESP and I have expanded my understanding of it. I am now in a position to state its benefits. Basically, these are threefold.

Firstly, there is *learning speed*. ESP results in faster acquisition of required language skills. This is because it follows a pattern, which students learn what they need, when they need it, in authentic, content-based contexts.

Secondly, there is *learning efficiency*. On an ESP course students make the maximal use of their learning resources, all of which are brought to bear on acquiring specific, pre-identified linguistic items and skills. Obviously, the needs analysis is of vital importance here, since it enables teachers to determine the specific requirements of students.

Thirdly, there is *learning effectiveness*. On completion of an ESP course, students are ready to use language appropriately in tasks which have been identified prior to the course by means of needs analysis

ESP is proven so open to all learning purposes and able to use the suitable pedagogical style, appropriate materials and course design for each discipline and field of study more effectively. ESP is considerably practical because it meets the individual needs and goals of either preparing for academic studies or work. Because it is so goal oriented or tailored to the needs of students, maintains motivation levels high throughout the course and keeps students efforts focused on its aims.

Having put forward my understanding of the benefits of ESP, I have to also consider those aspects that make it less agreeable to some teachers.

The fact that students might know more than the teacher about certain subjects from which specific genres are taken. The fact that the teacher has to study specific content and consider contexts as situation that the future profession will encounter.

The fact that teachers need to carry out needs analysis, which is a time consuming activity that requires consultation with the target community. Despite the fact that ESP has these contingencies, I still feel that the gains are greater.

CHAPTER 3

NEEDS ANALYSIS

In this chapter, we shall be seeking answers to two questions. Firstly, what do we mean by 'needs'? and 'what kind of information should a needs analysis give us'?

One of the greatest contributions of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to language teaching has been its emphasis on careful and extensive needs analysis for course design (John, 1991). All language courses are based on a perceived need of some sort and needs analysis, as an essential part of course design, has been focused on learners' communicative needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1993) state that learner's needs and purpose for learning should be considered in the process of planning the content of a language program, accordingly:

"All language teaching must be designed for the specific learning and language use purposes of identified groups of students" (Johns, 1991: 67).

Thus, A needs analysis is a method of obtaining a description of a learner's needs (or a group of learners' needs). It will take into account the specific purposes for which the learner will use the language, the kind of language to be used, the starting level, and the target level which is to be achieved.

On the whole, needs analysis is a complex process which is usually followed by syllabus design, selection of course materials, teaching / learning a course, and evaluation. This is absolutely crucial if the course is to be maximally effective.

We must start with the questions 'why do these learners **need** to learn English? and what does the learner **need** to know in order to function effectively in this situation?'

We know that learners have different learning backgrounds, from secondary to doctorate or post-doctorate levels and their linguistic needs vary. On the other hand, all of the learners need to use a specific area of the English language in the shortest term possible (the other aspects of language should not be ignored). Therefore, after identifying the reasons why English is needed, the learners have to be identified; their situation, the target situation and the learning context are then analysed. The learners' potentials are identified, as well as the skills and knowledge needed to attain the target situation - taking constraints,

such as aptitude, time and technical resources, into consideration. This information may be recorded in terms of language items, skills, strategies, subject knowledge, etc...

Hence, ESP practitioners must know exactly what they are trying to find out and what they will do with the answers before the course runs. With these data in mind, a course is designed and the materials are then chosen or specially designed. Evaluation is a very important tool so that strategies can be redefined and results improved.

WHAT IS MEANT BY NEEDS?

In a linguistic context, different authors define the term “needs” diversely, and thus different meanings are implied.

Richterich and Chancerel tried to understand what is meant by needs and found that:

“experience shows that in general the learner is little aware of his needs and, in particular, that he is unable to express them except in very vague terms”. Richterich and Chancerel (1987: 3)

We are not here to question Richterich and Chancerel’s experience and we are not clear about what type of ‘needs they meant (i.e. target needs or learning needs). In any case, learners, whether able to express their needs sufficiently or not, they remain the main source for gathering information. In fact, any teacher of ESP has to approach the learners in order to become aware of their linguistic needs. The teacher alone will not be able to ‘guess’ how much the learners know or lack, what is expected from them, their learning preferences and the best route for reaching the objectives.

Perhaps, what Richterich and Chancerel meant was that learners are able to express their needs, but the information they give us is generally diverse and ambiguous. Not only each learner is likely to have his/her point of view or need for that matter, only when both the learners and teachers begin to work side by side, needs became more transparent. Here, let’s not forget that teachers have needs of their own.

Faced with that ambiguity, Richterich notes the difficulty of reaching an agreed definition of needs analysis in that “The very concept of language needs has never been

clearly defined and remains at best ambiguous” Richterich (1983: 2). Once more, we might conclude that the list of language needs can be endless and the concept itself difficult to describe.

According to Dickinson:

“...if needs are understood as specific requirements for the foreign language, then the vast majority of learners do not have any. They are deemed to require what the syllabus offers them, and the syllabus is likely to be closely related to the examination, which is a highly realistic “need” for the majority of learners” (Dickinson, 1991:88).

Hence, we are informed that ‘needs’ are not simply the requirements for using a foreign language. Yet, this is not enough, it is best to know what we mean by needs rather than knowing what needs are not. The research to date has considered the concept through various perspectives and proposed various interpretations accordingly.

IMPORTANCE OF IMPLEMENTING A NEEDS ANALYSIS

Robinson (1991) believes that needs analysts should be cautious in collecting information from various sources due to the multiplicity and diversity of the views on prerequisites for an ESP course.

Then the teacher is one step nearer being able to translate ‘needs’ into linguistic and pedagogic terms in order to produce and teach an effective course.

Three sources of pre-course needs indicators were distinguished by Richterich and Chancerel (1987): students, employers, and academic organization. West (1992) maintains that ‘Needs as interpreted by the sponsors may indeed conflict with the needs felt by the learner.’ West (1992: 12). Hutchinson and Waters (1993) holds that the relationship between necessities as perceived by a sponsor or an ESP teacher, and what the learners want or feel can be at extreme poles. However, he suggests that learners’ perceived wants and wishes should be considered carefully, and due to objective and subjective reality of needs, each learning situation should be considered uniquely and systematically.

Bearing in mind a wide range of needs due to the influence of different social and cultural factors on student's learning (Peck, 1991), a needs analysis is considered as a prerequisite in any course design (Richterich and Chancerel, 1987).

According to Knox (1997), "...a needs assessment enables researchers to justify their assumptions whether or not potential educational needs are sound, to design a program in terms of topics, materials so as to be responsive to the needs of participants" Knox (1997: 56). This can maximize the likelihood of students' participation. Finally such focus on satisfying learner needs will help the learners to insist to learn and apply what they learn.

Richards (1990) deals with this issue from the point of curriculum development, and he holds that the data to be collected in the planning process will help to identify general and specific language needs and content of a language program. Besides, it will provide data to review and evaluate the existing program. Yet it is recommended that a needs analysis should be carried out during the life of each course (Richterich and Chancerel, 1987, Knox, 1987), because "...as students become more involved with the course, their attitudes and approach may change" (Robinson, 1991: 15). This can help both administrators and teachers to introduce necessary changes, if deemed necessary, so as to promote learners in their progress throughout the program. Hence, the conclusions drawn in the initial analysis have to be re-assessed (Dudley-Evans & Jo St John, 1998:140). Finally, a final evaluation allows to place future activities. At this stage, learners must be given feedback. "Feedback is good PR (Public Relations), good for quantity and quality of future co-operation" (Dudley-Evans & Jo St John, 1998:139).

TYPES OF NEEDS

Within ESP the definition of needs and needs analysis have broadened with experience and research. With Munby's book: '*Communicative Syllabus Design*' (1978), the teaching of English began to appreciate that *function* and *situation* were also important.

When we talk about needs analysis, we must recognise that there is much more to needs than for example: simply identifying the linguistic features of the target situation.

Hence, needs analysis is a complex process, involving several aspects. For instance:

“...needs are described as objective and subjective (Brindley, 1989: 65), perceived and felt (Berwick, 1989: 55), target situation/ goal oriented and learning, process- oriented and product- oriented...”(Brindley, 1989: 63).

For instance ‘to feel confident’ is a **subjective/felt** need and ‘to be able to follow instructions effectively’ is an **objective/perceived** need’. Hence, objective and subjective views of needs can conflict and it is important that the ESP teacher takes account of these differences when designing the course. Similarly, **product- oriented** needs derive from the goal or target situation **and process- oriented** needs derive from the learning situation.

TYPES OF ANALYSIS

The above pairs can be seen as corresponding to a *target situation analysis* (TSA) and *learning situation analysis* (LSA), a third part of analyse focus on what the learner already knows, a present situation analyse (PSA), from which we can find out their lacks. Put simply, ‘...there are necessities, wants and lacks’ 1987: 55) (Dickinson (1991:91 and Hutchinson and Waters (1996:55) make a useful division of learners’ needs into necessities (what the learners have to know to function effectively), wants (what the learners think they need) and lacks (what the learners do not know).

Bloor (1984:15,25) defines the PSA as a learner-centered needs analysis, and TSA as a target-centered analysis, and emphasizes that operation of both analyses during a term is certainly desirable. Robinson (1991) also holds that TSA and PSA are complementary and form a needs analysis. Thus, A careful needs analysis should involve “*Present situation analysis*” (PSA), “*Target situation analysis*” (TSA) and last but not least *learning situation analysis* (LSA).

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF THE TARGET SITUATION AND LEARNING SITUATION

As mentioned before, any needs analysis must include **personal** information about the learners: factors which may affect the way they learn such as previous learning experiences and **professional** information about the learners: the tasks and activities learners are/will be using English for. The following are the various questions to be asked in a questionnaire:

Where: where will you use English? This is about circumstances

- physical setting: university, classroom, lecture theatre, *hotel...*
- human context: presentations, on the telephone, *travel arrangements...*
- linguistic context: Portugal and/or abroad

where will the ESP course take place?

- university classroom or other.

Who: who will you use English with?

- both native and non-native speakers: experts, laymen, and students...
- relationships: student-teacher, peer, subordinates and superiors, *English- speaking foreigners...*

who are the learners?

- language information about the learners: what are their current skills and language use- present situation analysis.

- The learner's lacks.

When: we want to know about deadlines and perhaps how long we have for course- means analysis.

when will the language be used?

- concurrently in the ESP course, subsequently, seldom, in small amounts.

when will the course take place?

- time of day: morning or afternoon, in summer or winter...

What: 'what will you want to say or find out?

what will the content be?

- subject: tourism...
- level: academic or professional

what resources are available?

- materials provided jointly by students and one teacher, positive towards ESP with interest in the subject matter
- aids: black/white board, O.H.P., slide projector, and video

why is the language needed?

- for study, for work (present and future), for promotion, for recreation...

why are the learners taking the course?

- is it compulsory?
- it fills a perceived need
- they hope to improve fluency
- they have a positive attitude to ESP...

how will the language be used?

- medium: speaking, listening...
- channel: face-to-face, telephone...
- types of text/discourse: discussions, formal conversations with people in the same field, *informal conversations in other contexts...*

how do the learners learn?

- concept of teaching and learning the skills and language: traditional or modern, depending on age and personality- learning needs
- communicative methodology- knowledge of how language and skills are used in the target situation- linguistic analysis, discourse analysis, genre analysis.

Richterich and Chancerel (1987) point out that due to the fact that needs vary too much across time, instructional contexts and from person to person (the learners and teachers may have different needs), the system should be continually adapted.

The aim is to know learners as people, as language users and as language learners, to know how language learning and skills learning can be maximised for a given learner group, and finally to know the target situation and learning environment such that we can interpret the data appropriately.

We need to bear in mind that the findings from needs analysis are not absolute but relative and there is no single, unique set of needs. Porcer (1983) emphasizes, “To speak of a need (language or other) is not the same as speaking in general what is lacking. A need does not exist prior to a project; it is always constructed” Porcer (1983: 129).

Further, “The needs that are established for a particular group of students... will be influenced by the ideological perceptions of the analysts” (Robinson P, *ESP Today: A practitioner’s Guide*, (Prentice Hall International, 1991: 7) and also by the bias with which every individual views their own future. Thus, the findings depend on who asks what questions and how the respondents are interpreted. This view will also affect what, at the course design stage, is prioritised within a given set of needs.

TARGET, PRESENT AND LEARNING SITUATION ANALYSIS

Target needs include what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation and involves identifying the linguistic features of the target situation.

We have to establish which linguistic areas the learner needs to work on, **why** the learners need to improve their English and **how** they might need to use the language in a practical way in the workplace.

There is little point in teaching the language of report writing to a learner who does not have to write reports. It is also important to find out what the sponsor (who might not actually be one of the participants of the course) would like to achieve from the course.

Needs cannot be defined simply as the language the student has to acquire or where the students are heading to but also where they are coming from.

PSA aims at finding out the students' English proficiency level and their existing language requirements at the beginning of a language program. It is clearly important to make an assessment of the language skills of the course participants and to decide which linguistic areas the learners need to develop.

Thus, what the learners need to know minus their existing proficiency equals their lacks (Hutchinson, Waters and Breen 1979).

However, we cannot talk about language proficiency and language learning as if we were describing plants and minerals or doing a mathematical equation for that matter.

What we must consider next, is the actual journey/route that is to be followed in order to be able to perform to the required degree of competence in the target situation. That is, how are we going to get from our starting point to the destination while taking into account the learning needs. That is, we must choose our route according to the learning situation. It is not enough to identify what the learner needs to know and what people do. This type of analysis does not tell us how they learnt to do it. Thus, the learning situation must be taken into account. We need to know about language learning. In other words we need a learning-centred approach. Learning needs are what the learner needs to do in order to learn.

Richterich (1983), claimed that objective needs analysis form the broad parameters of the program, but when learning starts these language related needs will alter, and some sort of *learning needs* which were not specified pre-course will appear. Therefore, at this step subjective needs analysis is essential to collect information from learners so as to guide the learning process.

The process of learning is obviously affected by the attitude of the learner towards the teaching itself. Therefore, the relationship between the learner and the content of learning should be considered as a pre-requisite in specifying and analysing the needs of a learner. Each language teacher has to make professional decisions to ensure effective language learning.

The key concepts which are to be considered in any language learning needs analysis include "...the goals of a language course, the learning needs of the individual learner, the active involvement of learners in their learning processes, learners decisions about methodological preferences and attitudes to the importance of various language

skills and real communication - carrying out meaningful tasks and teaching meaningful (to the learner) language” (Nunan & Lamb, 1996:34). Thus, the whole process should take into account learning preferences and working styles (Powell, 2003).

“While target situation needs is concerned with the important area of language use, learning needs cover circumstances of language learning, i.e. why learners take the course – optional or compulsory, what they seek to achieve and their attitude towards the course”. (Hutchinson & Waters, 1996:62).

The ESP teacher must also acknowledge that what works well in one situation may not work in another. While hotel staff around the world may share some similar language needs, how they learn the language, the conditions in which they are learning and where and how they apply the language are not the same.

WHAT COMPOSES A GOOD NEEDS ANALYSIS

(i) Placement testing. This consists of administering tests designed to assess general English ability to perform adequately in business contexts. In order to determine the starting level of courses in the training programme.

(ii) Linguistic needs analysis. This enables trainers to determine the type, content (skill development, linguistic structures, lexical items, functions and levels of formality must be identified) and duration of the course.

(iii) Learning needs analysis. This enables trainers to identify learners' attitudes and preferences towards different kinds of teaching methodology, learning tasks and activities and develop courses and practice materials, which use the learners' preferred methods of learning.

(iv) Learner perceptions analysis. Here, trainers attempt to discover trainees' perceptions of themselves and others as part of their company culture, and their relationships with people from other company cultures. The needs analysis should ideally also give the trainer some information about the nature and background of the learner's company. This will enable the trainer to incorporate the specific lexis related to that particular industry into the course.

(v) Communicative problems analysis which arise not from linguistic inadequacy, but from differences in culture or communicative style (linguistic or non-linguistic) that can lead to conflict and misunderstanding. This enables them to develop appropriate communicative and cross-cultural strategies in course design.

GIVING SPECIAL ATTENTION TO STUDENT'S INPUT

Learners have their own opinions, perceptions and priorities regarding their needs, and these cannot be ignored. The students may well have a clear idea of the “necessities” of the target situation, and are aware of their “lacks.” But what they really “want” conflicts with what their sponsors and teachers feel they should be taught. The point is that learners' wishes and views have to be considered, even if they are not consistent with the target need.

In designing and developing English courses that aim to improve workplace communication, students can be a valuable source of help to course designers and teachers. Strevens (1988) pointed out that one area of difficulty for teachers of ESP courses is the gap between the learner's knowledge of the special subject and the teacher's ignorance of it. He recommended several techniques to tackle the problem, and one of them is to allow the students to put you [the teacher] right! “Do not be above letting the students correct your solecisms in the subject” (Stevens 1988). In fact, right from the planning stage of the course, students can help in identifying their own needs. Hutchinson and Waters (1987), who favour a learning-centred approach to needs analysis, think that in analysing the needs of students, it would be normal practice to ask both the lecturers and the students about their English needs. They also maintain that needs analysis is not a once-and-for-all

activity. Needs must be frequently negotiated between teacher, the student and the class as the course unfolds. Nunan (1989) also believes that there is a need for informal monitoring to identify changing needs and that it is essential to involve the learner in the decision making process through discussion and consultation. Tudor (1993:22-31) points out that students may well have a closer insight into their communicative needs than the teacher, and thus they should have a say in content selection of the learning programme. Palacios (1993:44-47) also argues that teachers, being constantly enriched by daily contact with their learners, should learn continually from their students, with the purpose of incorporating everything they learn into their teaching.

One of the benefits, as remarked by Chase (1989), is that sometimes the students are more motivated to learn when they have discovered for themselves what their needs are rather than when they are informed of their needs by their English teachers. If teachers are willing to involve the students, they will not be in the uncomfortable position of being less knowledgeable than their students (Spack 1988:29-53), who are now cast in the role of consultants.

Apart from stressing the importance of both target situation needs and learning needs, one has to consider the various perceptions regarding needs.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PERCEIVED VERSUS ACTUAL LANGUAGE SKILLS

The notion that people's assessment of their ability to speak English may or may not be accurate. On one side of the question, according to recent surveys conducted by Graddol (1995) "77% of Danish adults and 75% of Swedish adults for example, say they can take part in a conversation in English'. Further, 'nearly one third of the citizens of the 13 non English- speaking countries in EU can speak English well enough to take part in a conversation". However, Richard Parker in his book 'Mixed Signals: The Prospects for Global Television News' (1995), is inviting us to bear in mind the difference between 'perceived' versus 'actual' language skills. According to research by Lintas:

“ When ad researchers recently tested 4,500 Europeans for ‘perceived’ versus ‘actual’ English-language skills, the results were discouraging. First, the interviewees were asked to evaluate their English-language abilities, and then to translate a series of sample English phrases or sentences. The study produced, in its own words, ‘sobering’ results... In countries such as France, Spain and Italy, the study found, fewer than 3 percent had excellent command of English; only in small markets, such as Scandinavia and low countries did the numbers even exceed 10 percent ” Lintas (1990:95).

This last point is particularly important. That is, fewer people than we think speak and understand English. Put simply, the accuracy of statistical results regarding both the number of English speakers and their language skills is questionable. In the case of receptionists in Portugal, we cannot assume that their ability to perform in English is as they report. Therefore, before running a ESP course for a group of Portuguese receptionists, the teacher has to assess/test their ability to use English at work.

THE CLASS QUESTIONNAIRE

One of the challenges in Needs Analysis is asking the right questions to get the answers we are looking for. This framework below guides the course designer analysing the language and learning needs of any ESP class (Dudley-Evans & Jo St John, 1998:125) and covers the following areas:

- A target situation analysis & objective needs
- B wants, means, subjective needs
- C present situation analysis
- D learners’ lacks
- E learning needs
- F linguistic and discourse analysis
- G what is wanted from the course
- H means analysis

According to (Dudley-Evans & Jo St John, 1998:125), the interpretation of these points is as follows: 'A includes professional information about learners: what they will be using English for; B includes personal information about learners: attitude to English, previous experiences. C includes English language information about learners: their current skills and experiences in language use; D defines the gap between C and A.

E includes language learning information: effective ways of learning the skills and the language; H includes information about the environment in which the course will be run'.

Having those areas in mind, the ESP course designer will prepare a series of questions with the awareness that there may be variations in both perceived and actual needs/skills between individuals in any one class.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I discuss the methods that I use to undertake research in the area of English for receptionists in Portugal. I outline the method, population, pilot studies and problems I had to overcome.

Linguistic needs were analysed using a variety of means: observation, questioning, interviewing the receptionists, employers and others involved in the tourism community, and the collecting of literature such as textbooks and manuals, which I have analysed. Nevertheless, the main source for my needs analysis was the receptionists themselves. The fundamental aim of my analysis was to investigate the situations in which receptionists have to use English, the appropriate genres and the suitable language content. The outcome is expressed as a list of strategies, language and genres that can be the basis for a course.

The main method used for gathering the necessary information was a questionnaire, which is probably one of the most popular devices for needs analysis. Questionnaires are thought to be the least time-consuming ways of collecting information and data may be easily analysed. When using a questionnaire, one has to determine what information is required and design a list of effective questions to elicit this information, while keeping in mind that the questions must elicit the right information in such a way as to facilitate the statistical work to be applied.

INTERVIEWS

The respondents were also interviewed, some even on the weekly basis. The data obtained from the interviews was not documented, but was beneficial in providing important additional information regarding receptionist's linguistic weaknesses. Also, ideas generated in talks with the interviewees provided concepts for items in the questionnaire. For example, some interviewees stated that they sometimes have to deal with angry guests. An item on this issue was included in the questionnaire (see appendix 2).

Interviews are known as reliable sources for gathering data on learner needs yet are difficult to quantify and systematise. I interviewed receptionists on a one-to-one basis. Receptionists were able to talk about their difficulties, thus revealing their current needs. My general objective was to analyse the communication between the Portuguese receptionists and the hotel 'community', mainly guests and other members of the tourism industry.

We have considered various factors such as: attitudes, language skills, culture awareness, stereotypes, etc. One of the main objectives was to gather enough valid data to form a series of general statements.

A few interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, which allowed for full concentration on the respondent's replies, their opinions, beliefs and experiences.

QUESTIONNAIRES

Two needs analysis questionnaires were created. The first targeted a few participants and was used as a pilot study and the final, more refined questionnaire was filled in by 40 hotel receptionists. Before the final questionnaires were completed to my satisfaction (see Appendix A), a pilot study was translated into Portuguese and conducted on a few individuals. That pilot run was made to indicate what questions had been poorly phrased and if any important information was missing.

Originally, I created a random sample to find out what skills receptionists wish/need to improve. According to our respondents' answers, the most desirable skills are to understand English well and if possible speak it fluently. However, this kind of information would not be of great importance for the development of specific, usable and achievable, required language skills for the reception. All in all, decision-making on question types for the final questionnaire was influenced by the information I got from the pilot study.

Next, a final and more efficient quantitative approach of distributing structured questionnaires was used to gather data. Hence, the correct and appropriate number of questions was asked. The questionnaire consisted of closed questions. It was decided to include mostly closed questions so that concise answers would be gathered.

The questions focused on communicative situations, tasks and skills performed in English by the Portuguese hotel receptionists.

The questionnaire had 6 questions: 4 of which were generally related to learners' perceptions of their interrelated needs, wants and lacks, and two multiple-choice questions, one various learning settings and competences and the other on personal and professional skills other than language they wish to obtain. These gave a diversity of answers to choose from.

The three-page questionnaire aimed at an in-depth investigation. The question marked 1 aimed at identifying the various places where the respondents had learnt English. The immediate purpose of which was to see how much contact the respondents had had with English.

An important aspect, which the questionnaire included, was concerned with learning styles and strategies. Since learner-centred approach is considered to be crucial for successful learning, information on the ways in which learners prefer to learn was obtained. Thus, question number 2 was formulated in order to allow the informant to express his/her preference with regards to teaching/learning styles and methods. The results of this investigation have provided valuable input into the needs analysis.

The third question sought to explore the extent of English usage. I have added this question to the list with the intention of finding some information about how often English is used and the possible answers ranged from never to very frequently. Question 4 included a list of language-based tasks/activities which are performed in English. The following is an example of type of task: "do you give information about the hotel and the local facilities to the guests in English?, if so, how confident are you in doing so?"

The respondent had to tick the task that he/she performed in English and to rank, on a scale of 1 to 5, the extent to which he/she feels confident doing it (1 represents least confident and 5 most confident). The reason why I included the ranking was that I wished to refine the respondents' responses as to confidence. Thus, avoiding the ever-present possibility of self-delusion that respondents may have regarding their language competence.

In question 5, they were required to list the main aspects (not-language related) which interfere with or prevent communication in English from succeeding or from being done as planned. The last question asked them what skills, apart from improving their English, they wish to develop.

Most comments and queries during the interviews and the filling in of the questionnaires made by the respondents with regards to the questionnaires were taken into account and registered. All of the oral and written responses given and relevant information obtained was considered and analysed carefully.

COLLECTION OF AUTHENTIC WORKPLACE TEXTS

Throughout my research, and in fact as an on-going process, receptionists have provided samples of professional genres they have written or received. This has enabled me to analyse the wording and form of these authentic texts. Nevertheless, it was sometimes impossible to obtain documents/ texts, since it was against the company's regulations, to allow outsiders, no matter the circumstances, to get documents that might contain sensitive information on their clients, employees and business interests.

VISITS TO THE WORKPLACE

I visited the hotels to obtain an understanding of the operation of the reception and to observe receptionists at work.

Several hours were spent at the hotel's receptions just beside the desk, to observe the procedures involved and the communication required to assist the guests.

Throughout those visits, I talked to the receptionists on duty about the extent to which English is used and how confidently they communicated in it.

PARTICIPANTS

The first aspect to consider before formulating a set of specific questions is to take into account the nature of the target group. Nineteen different hotels were visited during the course of this project over a period of approximately five months and forty questionnaires were distributed to the receptionists of those hotels.

The basic results of this research were gathered from forty respondents, male and female (majority men). Their age ranging between 18 and 38 years old, with the majority in their late twenties or early thirties.

The participants of this study had different backgrounds in terms of schooling, nationality/culture and language knowledge/learning. Almost all of the receptionists working in Portugal had studied English either at home or at school before starting to work as receptionists. All of them had Portuguese as a mother tongue, although some were Brazilian. All of them had studied English, and some had also studied German or other languages. Depending largely on their age, they had studied English from three to ten years at school. The level achieved in English ranged from intermediate to advanced, and their motivation to further learn English was variable, depending on their proficiency and self-confidence. Generally, though, their motivation was quite high.

Respondents were approached in their place of work- reception. Receptionists were not asked to submit their names- respondents' answers were anonymous. While questionnaires were being completed, I kept a discrete distance and only provided explanations or further information when was asked for.

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS

The aim of my research was to analyse the extent to which the receptionists in Portugal are using English as a common medium for communication and how confident they feel while doing so. This session aims at presenting the results of the analysis of learners' linguistic needs, wants and lacks.

I opted for the use of questionnaires and interview the receptionists on duty to make available an in-depth understanding of the participant's knowledge and use of English.

The use of both questionnaires and interviews not only provided detailed information on the issues of concern but it also validated the research/material previously gathered. This study found that the majority of the participants have studied English at college and it is a major tool of communication at work.

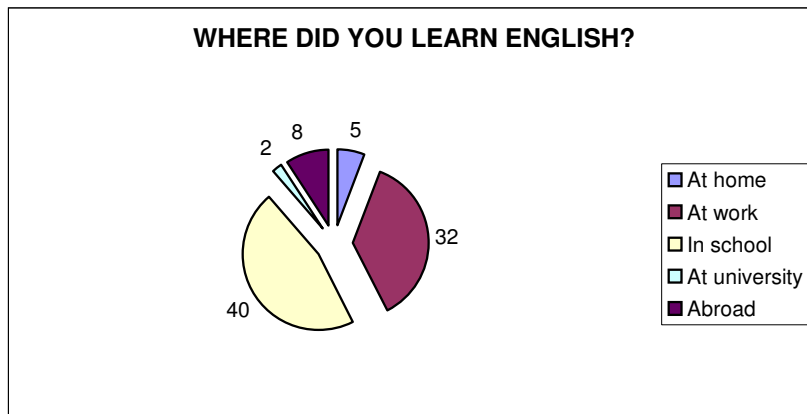
All of the respondents have considered English necessary in their jobs in Portugal. It is shown below that the participants are motivated to learn and speak English for purely instrumental purposes. In other words, they perceive English as a tool needed to acquire professional expertise.

Each question is followed by the results and an auxiliary graph for each aspect of research. The first part of the questionnaire focused on gathering information about where the participants have learnt English, how they prefer to learn it and how often they need to use it. Some of the participants have chosen more than one option. For example, for the first question '*where did you learn English?*' we found that the same participant responded '*at school*' and '*at work*' and the same happened for the other questions. All of the participants have answered that they did so in school and the majority of them have also learnt it at work, as shown in the table below:

Table 1: shows the various places where the participants learnt English

At home	5
At work	32
In school	40
At university	2
Abroad	8

Graph 1



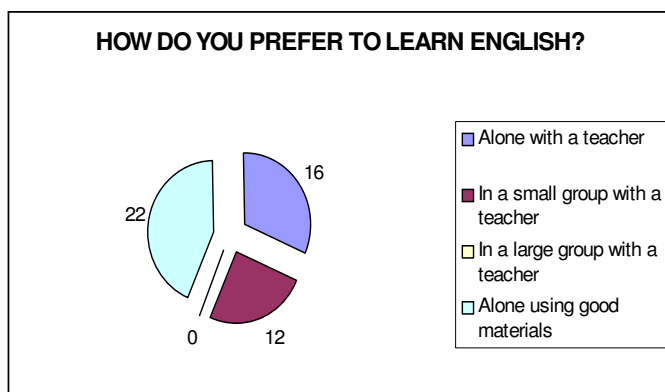
It is worth mentioning that 6 out of the 8 participants who learnt English abroad, have in general shown more confidence than the rest in dealing with conflict and complaints.

It was likewise important to find out what their preferences regarding the various teaching/learning processes are. Therefore, our second question was: how do you prefer to learn English. This is a very essential question in any needs analysis questionnaire. This question was formulated as a multiple-choice inquiry and different answers were suggested: privately with a teacher, in small groups, in a large group under teacher's guidance and independently using good materials. The answers obtained were the following:

Table 2: shows the participants' preferences regarding the various teaching/learning processes

Alone with a teacher	16
In a small group with a teacher	12
In a large group with a teacher	0
Alone using good materials	22

Graph 2



It can be seen that the respondents' preferences for teaching (and learning) styles are: to learn English either independently while using good materials or alone with help from a teacher. On the contrary, none of the forty receptionists like to learn English in a large group. Thus, according to the results showed in the above table, the 'best' way of learning English is to be as independently as possible.

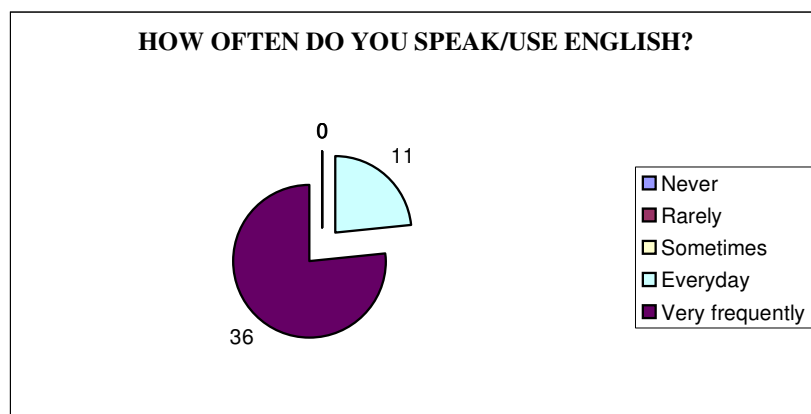
To conclude our first part of the questionnaire, it was crucial to know how often English is used by the receptionists.

The results below indicate that English is indeed very frequently necessary in the Portuguese hotels:

Table 3: shows how often the participants speak/use English

Never	0
Rarely	0
Sometimes	0
Everyday	11
Very frequently	36

Graph 3



The second part of our questionnaire was meant to find out what are the tasks performed in English by the Portuguese receptionists and to what extent the participants feel confident when speaking (either face to face or on the telephone), read and write in English. A list of tasks was presented to the participants.

The responses to this session shed light on learners' current needs- lacks are reflected in learners' assessment of their language skills on a four grade scale, which shows how confident they feel in relation to each task (one being the least confident and four being the most confident). The results are shown below:

Table 4: shows the participants' confidence in relation to the tasks performed in English (the first column on the left represents the least confident and the last column represents the most confident)

When you receive the guest	1	9	30
Get the quest's personal details		4	36
Give information about the hotel, touristic places and services	3	3	34
Translate information about services (travelling expences, food, time tables...)	8	10	12
Answer questions about Portuguese culture (food, entertainment, wheather...)	5	10	25

Answer other questions			19	21
Listen to the guest's requests	2		15	23
Listen to messages			18	22
Ask if the guest is satisfied			10	30
Listen to the guest's opinions about the hotel and the region	2		4	34
Listen to compliments	3		8	29
In conversations not related to the hotel/tourism (politics, football, religion...)	2	10	8	20
Make public announcements	5	3	20	12
Help a guest that is ill		7	14	19
Help a guest that is disable	2		8	30
Help the guest carrying the luggage			2	38
Receive tips or gifts from the guests		3	9	29
Deal with a conflict in the hotel	9		17	14
Lead with complaints orally expressed	4	11	8	17
Clarify misunderstandings	2		6	32
Listen to insults and offensive language	16	5	9	10
Say goodbye to the guest			8	32
Speak to other institution on the telephone		8	8	24
Contact the guests by telephone		3	19	18
Leave voice messages on the telephone	3	8	21	8
Listen to and register telephone messages	1	12	18	9
Get information by telephone		3	16	21
Give information about the hotel and region by telephone			11	29
Give other information by telephone			12	28
Answer questions by telephone	2	6	11	21
Receive information/ instructions by telephone (regarding the guests arrival and specific needs)			8	32
Ask for clarifications by telephone		4	8	28
Clarify misunderstandings by telephone			9	31
Make appointments by telephone			2	38
Deal with complaints by telephone	3	10	1	26
Deal with offensive language by telephone	13	1	11	15
End a telephone conversation			15	25
Read letters		2	2	36
Read complaints	2	4	18	16
Read a curriculum vitae and cover letters	4	8	16	12
Read advertisement and leaflets		1	20	19
Read faxes	1	4	5	30
Read e- mails		1	8	31
Read web sites	4	7	5	24
Read magazines about tourism		2	7	31
Read travelling guides		1	9	30
Read the guest's messages			13	27
Read the guest's personal documents		2	6	32
Read other types of correspondence		1	8	31
Write/ alter the guest's personal details			6	34

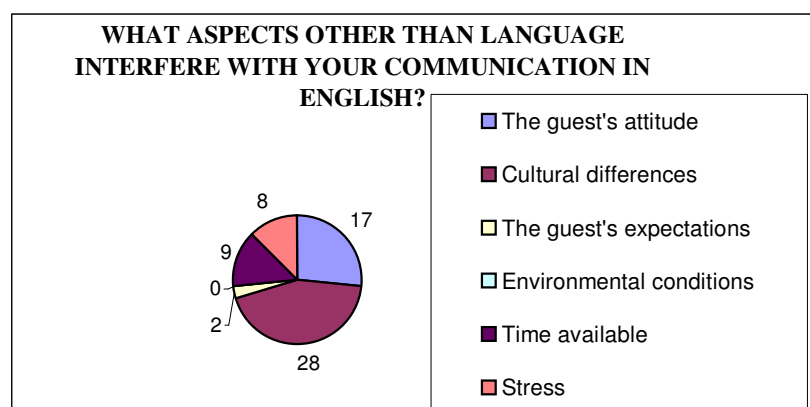
Fill in forms		4	36
Write letters	10	5	25
Write post cards	1	6	33
Write reports	4	9	19
Write messages	2	12	26
Answer e-mails	3	19	18
Create and delete files	7	9	24
Write faxes	6	8	26
Fill in complaint's forms	3	9	12
Other (s)			16

Finally the third part of my questionnaire enquired about any aspects, other than language, which create problems to communication in English. Under this heading we intended to find out more about whether lack of intercultural competence had caused problems. The following figures were obtained:

Table 5: shows the aspects which create obstacles to communication in English

The guest's attitude	17
Cultural differences	28
The guest's expectations	2
Environmental conditions and rules at work	0
Time available	9
Stress	8

Graph 5



Cultural differences are clearly on the way of communication in English according to 28 of the participants. The guest's attitude comes second on this list as also interfering with communication.

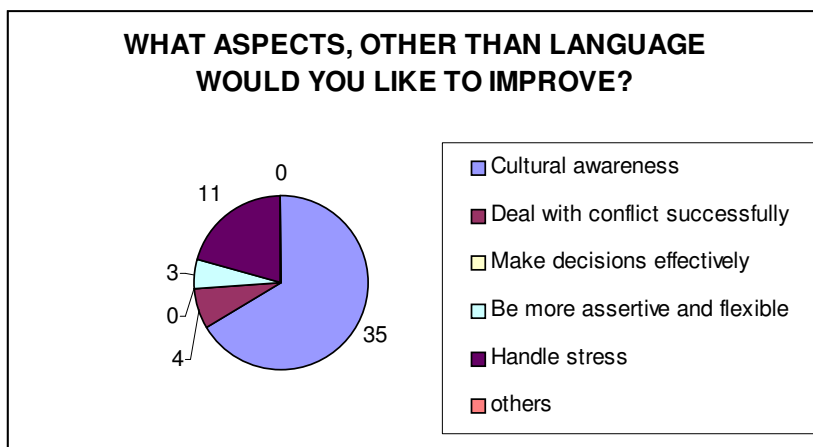
My final question was: 'Apart from improving your English language, what other skills would you like to develop?'

Receptionists' wants are also reflected in their responses to this question and presented below:

Table 6: shows the participants' wants

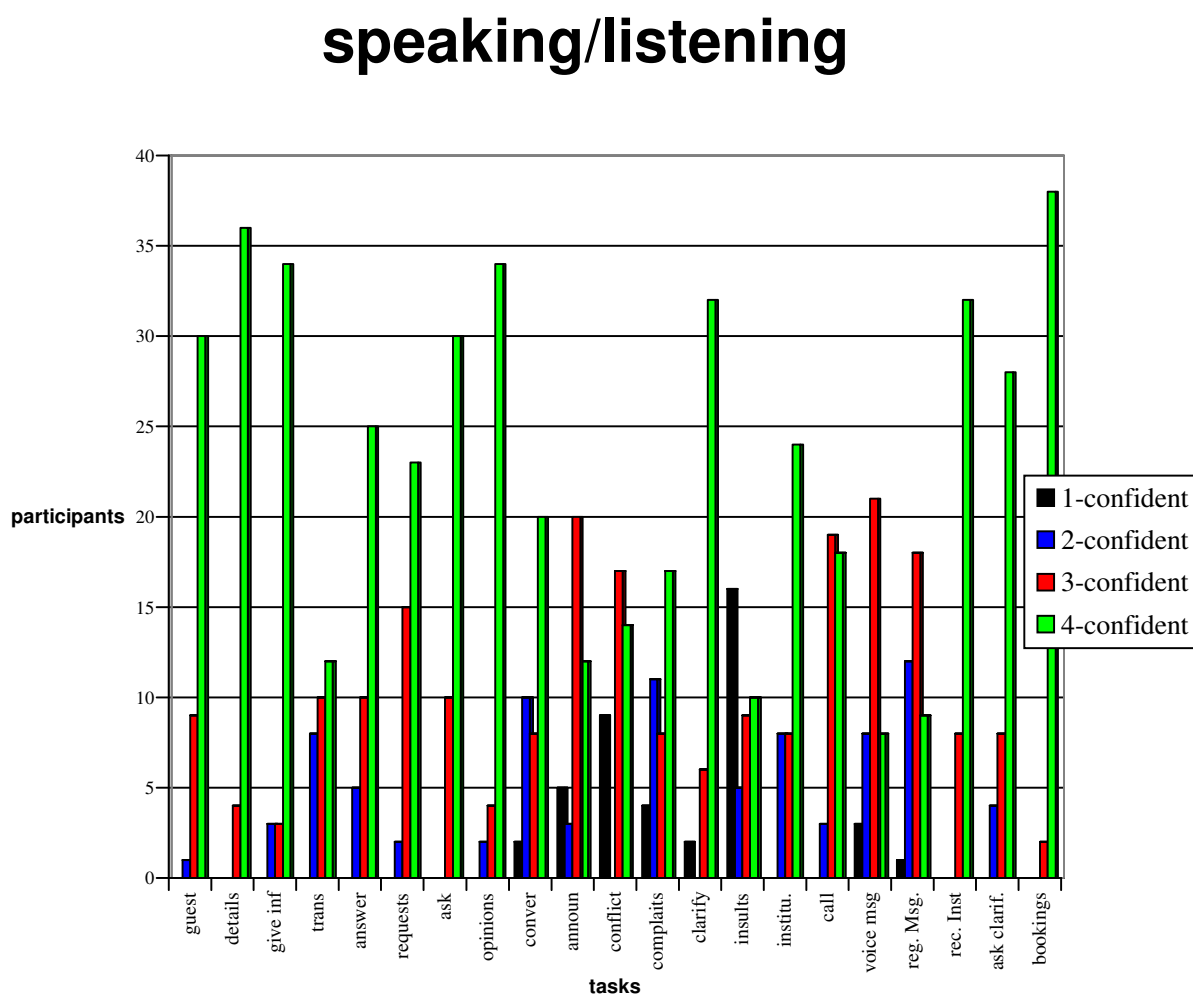
Cultural awareness	35
Deal with conflict successfully	4
Make decisions effectively	0
Be more assertive and flexible	3
Handle stress	11
others	0

Graph 6



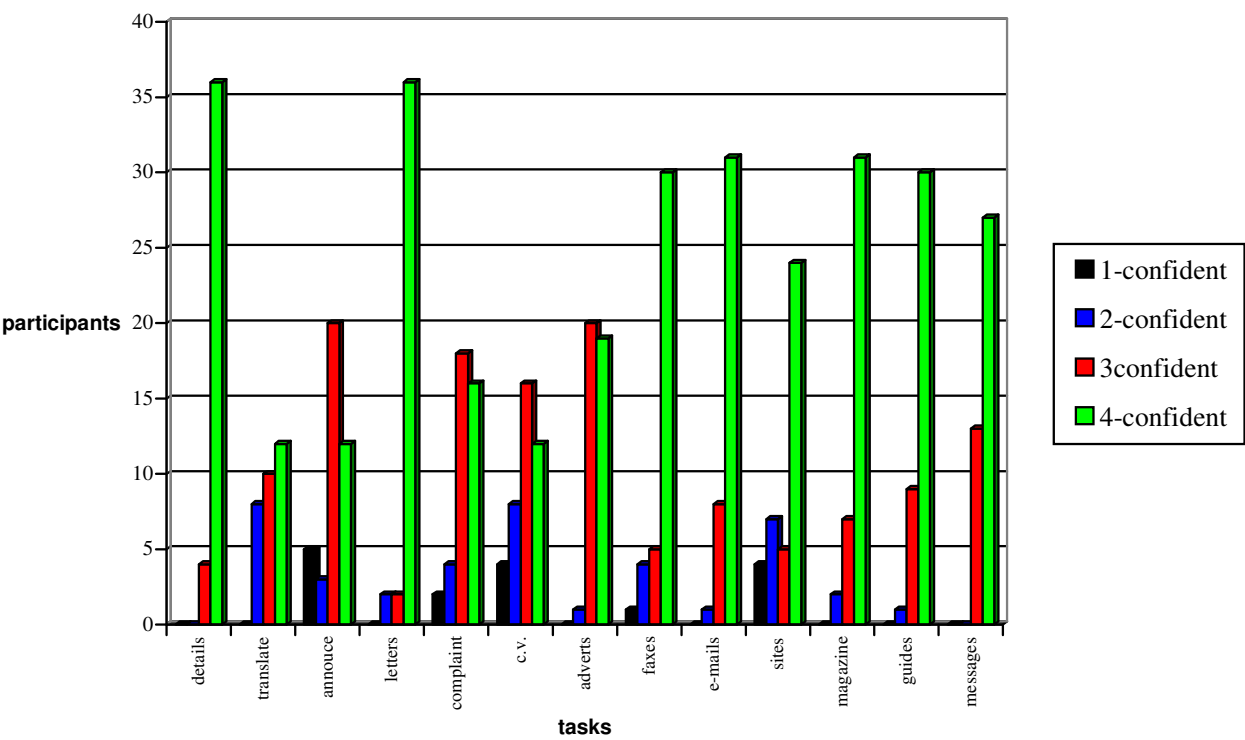
The number one preference for training turned out to be cultural awareness, demanded by most respondents. Secondly, handling stress – was demanded by 11 of the respondents.

Graph 7: A list of speaking and listening tasks performed in English by the receptionists and degree of confidence

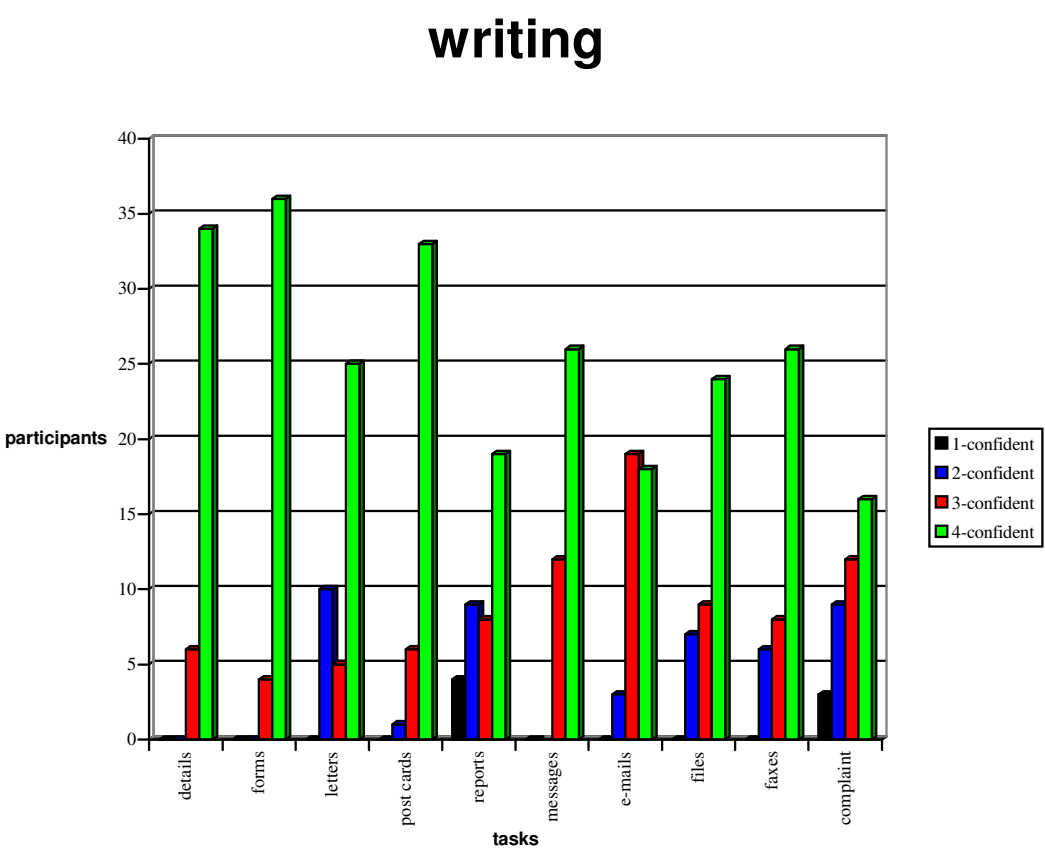


Graph 8: A list of reading activities performed in English by the receptionists and degree of confidence

reading



Graph 9: A List of writing tasks performed in English by the receptionists and degree of confidence:



DISCUSSION OF MAIN FINDINGS

In this chapter, I outline and critically discuss the main findings of my research regarding the English language needs of the Portuguese hotel receptionists. It can be said that a '*need*' describes an item or an ability, which is important to a person and which he/she does not have or is not very good at. Yet, this is not a final nor untouched definition of '*need*' as it is a complex term sometimes difficult to understand. This chapter presents the various tasks performed in English by the receptionists and discusses those which are in the need of attention. In other words, we shall analyse the various tasks, which according to the respondents are carried out with less or greater confidence. I shall present the respondents' own perceived language needs as well as those that institutions impose on them.. Initially, I provide a summary of the findings, before I make a critical examination of these in the light of the overall aims of my dissertation.

According to the findings, English is used frequently by all of the receptionists across a wide spectrum of Portuguese hotels as the clients are mainly tourists and businessmen.

In Portuguese hotels, English is mainly used for client contact, and this industry can even lose business because of inadequate English skills used by their staff. Communication skills in the hotels is increasingly recognized as a crucial competence and there is also the need to master specific language related skills to fulfill the employees' reception needs. This fact fits with David Crystal's report:

'British or American tourists travel around the world assuming that everyone speaks English, and it is somehow the fault of local people if they do not' David Crystal (1997:76).

Further, even those international travellers, non-native speakers of English expect hotel receptionists in Portugal to speak English.

Since the participants of this study are actively using English in a wide range of professional situations to fulfil professional aims, they form 'language habits' and their communicative competence is generally good. Constant contact with English brings about good language habits, for example,

'Behaviourist learning theory saw regular (oral) practice as helpful in forming correct language habits' (Candlin et al, 2001)

Also, motivation towards learning English showed by most participants could be because they perceive the communicative value of the language. This instrumental motivation may be as valid a predictor of success in language learning for these participants as any other. As suggested above (in the needs analysis session) students instrumentally motivated to learn English, need to perceive the relevance of second language learning in the furtherance of their career goals.

Hotel receptionists in Portugal use English to perform specific functions, which can be described as follows:

- ☐ Receive domestic and foreign guests in a hotel or guest house reception
- ☐ Provide information about accommodation
- ☐ Deal with reservations for rooms
- ☐ Answer the telephone.
- ☐ Welcome guests and acquaint them with the layout of the premises and the services available.
- ☐ Maintain a record of guests, checking in and out processes;
- ☐ Provide guests with all types of information regarding day trips, travel and other services.
- ☐ Take messages arriving for guests and see to their delivery

- ☐ See to guests' various needs such as waking them, sending faxes, photocopying, ordering food, taxis and tickets;
- ☐ Promote and sale various merchandising like souvenirs, postcards, newspapers and magazines;
- ☐ Liaise with national and foreign travel agencies and tour guides regarding requirements for travel groups and individuals;
- ☐ Prepare bills and accept payments from guests, check- in and out lists, status of rooms and payments.
- ☐ Represent the owners and the operators of the hotel to their guests.

From this professional needs it is clear that the work of a receptionist is varied and communication skills are widely used. Hotel staff is expected to be able to explore the various alternatives open to guest's, to take initiatives, negotiate and make decisions in English whenever necessary. Keeping this in mind, we now focus on the activities in which receptionists have to use English.

ORAL TASKS

Portuguese receptionists deal with guests face to face in English very frequently and according to their responses, they generally perform with great confidence. For instance, greeting the guest's on their arrival seems to be one of the easiest tasks carried out by receptionists. We can argue that their good performance in their first contact with the guests in English, both native and non-native speakers is likely to be the result of regular practice, since it is done on a daily basis.

Taking the guest's personal details is also an activity performed with great level of confidence. This is done as a routine and it normally follows the same order and structure. Both tasks: greeting the guests and taking their personal details are not likely to become highly challenging in the sense that novel situations are not bound to happen.

Put simply, the words and expressions, which are necessary in order to perform those tasks are not only unlikely to vary, but also as a result of repetition, the receptionists begin to perform them automatically.

Perhaps the biggest challenge to staff in the hotel industry during peak-demand periods is handling complaints. For example, customers frequently complain about having to ask several times for a simple item such as extra towels.

Most participants reported having difficulties handling complaints. Perhaps, the complaint itself is not the real problem, but the way in which the complaint is presented. That is, the receptionist can easily apologise to the guests for any inconvenience caused and take action to solve the problems. However, it becomes more difficult to deal with angry guests expressing their feelings in a less appropriate manner. Here, we are not only dealing with possible language problems but we are also faced with reactive behaviours or even 'complex' psychological traits.

How to handle conflict also poses a problem for some receptionists. The problem is more difficult when having to deal with offensive language and insults. On the other hand, receptionists might feel intimidated and the causes of performance fears are very individual and quite often have deep roots in the previous unsuccessful experience of language use. Moreover, shy and non-confident receptionists focus on form and correctness in producing language and are aware of their deviations from the established norms of English, but unable to generate appropriate responses. Psychologically, "the fear of mistakes is a fear of losing face, and this feature typically is of mature adults" (Rivers, 1992). They are concerned with how they are judged by others. They "are very cautious about making errors in what they say, for making errors would be a public display of ignorance" (Shumin, 1997:2-7).

In the case of telephoning, all participants report daily use of English. Other interesting situations included their weaknesses regarding:

- (1) how to leave voice messages on the telephone,
- (2) listen to and register telephone messages and
- (3) answer questions on the telephone.

These findings show that there is a greater complexity in speaking and listening to messages over the telephone than in face to face conversations. For instance, it can be sometimes challenging to take the guest's personal details on the telephone, where the receptionists have no access to the guest's documents and may need to clarify the information (e.g. spelling) .

Also, in a face to face conversation, speakers use non-linguistic devices such as stress, intonation, varied speech pace, gestures, facial expression to convey meaning and emotion. We may argue that, as long as face to face conversations do not involve conflict or any intercultural misunderstanding, receptionists seem to be more capable of communicating in this way than receiving messages over the telephone.

When it comes to translating, the needs to translate from and into English are clearly interdependent. For instance, a receptionist translates what a guest says to a Portuguese taxi driver and vice versa. According to the findings, translation is not a priority area.

In any case, we are not clear about whether or not receptionists are able to deal with novel situations with good confidence. For example, it may not be difficult to call a taxi and inform the guest about the prices, times and distance. However, a situation in which a guest loses a personal object in the taxi or wants to complain about the service can become less easy to translate. English is not used very frequently for presentations and or public announcements by receptionists. However, when it is, the job is not done with success. The participants reported having some difficulty in making public announcements. They need help with the appropriate language. Hence, we are mainly dealing with three aspects:

- 1- Lack of proficiency in English language. The participants of this study might not have studied general English for as long as necessary in order to reach the linguistic competence for making public announcements.
- 2- Lack of specific vocabulary. In order to make a public announcements, one has to master not only certain words and expressions associated with the topic presenting/announcing but also, in this case, one that relates to the hotel guest's needs

- 3- Fear of speaking in public. The type of announcements that are normally in demand may not be of great complexity. Put simply, the main obstacle is having to speak in public rather than lack of language.

Social Theorist Erving Goffman (1955) made that very clear with his theory of 'FACE' and its twofold workings: In human interaction, Goffman argues, people strive for a positive social value, i.e. the approval of others (= a positive face), while at the same time they also want to avoid other people's impediment (= a negative face).

That is, receptionists are likely to be capable of making announcements related to the guest's needs and wants at a given time. However, their soft skills such as 'problem solving' and 'interpersonal' 'attitude awareness' are lacking.

Receptionist's ability to deal with different English and non-native accents and different cultures is also in need of attention. Since intercultural communication is between people whose cultural perceptions and symbol systems are distinct, barriers exist. According to Gudykunst (1998) the factors, which contribute to misunderstanding in intercultural encounters are language barriers, culture, attitudes (e.g. prejudices) and stereotypes. For instance, our expectations regarding people from other cultures and ethnic groups are based on how we categorise them (i.e. she is English, he is black, etc).

From my findings, Portuguese receptionists converse at ease with the guests, to chat about Portugal generally while offering personalised service. There is an interesting aspect with regards to non-receptionist related English (i.e. politics, football, religion...). Since they do not share the same schemata, experiences or background knowledge when encountering new situations, they might have difficulty understanding them. This is one of the biggest barriers to full communication.

Hence, we encounter many aspects of cultural and social competence. Language and communication are deeply embedded in people's cultures and societies. Portuguese people who might not have much cultural and social competence in English-speaking cultures or other cultures for that matter may not understand certain meanings or may misunderstand certain ideas because they interpret meanings using their own cultural and social assumptions.

WRITTEN TASKS

There were some occasions when receptionists showed less confidence in writing (e.g., how to write reports and letters). It seemed that 'formal' writing is more difficult than entries in a log book and note-taking. However, the findings made me realise that taking comprehensible and sensible notes, i.e. writing complaints was not an easy job for them. So, I asked my informants to give me complaint forms from their hotels, so I could analyse their problems based on these materials. I have learnt that in some hotels, often two replies are sent out to a letter of complaint. The first reply acknowledges receipt of the letter and informs the complainant that immediate action will be taken to deal with the matter. The second reply is sent out later informing the complainant of the result of his or her complaint, and if necessary of the compensation the company is ready to make.

In general, written texts are denser than spoken language by using complex sentences. In relation to the work of Portuguese receptionists, it is clear that they use English mainly verbally with the guests. Even when they need to write in English, most texts are informal, short and simple such as e-mails, faxes and entries in the log books. Thus, as Portuguese receptionists do not often need to write complaints, instead they deal with them orally, they do not develop the necessary skills associated to the topic.

Also, only a few respondents have a need for reporting in English. This does not mean that the writing of reports and complaints are less important than the other communication activities; indeed, since it is both difficult and crucial, it needs special attention.

A considerably high frequency of use of English for faxes and e-mails (use electronic mail daily) were also reported. I read some faxes and e-mails at the hotels and found a few mistakes as well as some inappropriate language. Nevertheless, it was still possible to understand the overall aim of the fax.

After talking to the receptionists on duty, I discovered that those 'less correct' faxes did not yet cause any communication barrier as long as one uses the right set of cues that seem to play the same role as paralinguistic features in actual face-to-face conversations.

That is, in a e-mail we create a sense of personal involvement by using graphical representation, for example, exclamation mark, bold print, elongated vowel sounds, stress through underlining, and so on.

Perhaps outsiders would have difficulty understanding the discourse of those e-mails if they are not given the background or context in which the communication takes place. Because it is context bound, receptionists and guests understand each other very well despite incomplete sentences and fewer logical cohesive devices in the traditional sense, within the texts.

READING TASKS

It is noteworthy to comment on the reading skills data , which shows that over half of respondents are good at reading. Generally speaking, the majority of respondents are not aware of their reading weaknesses until encountering comprehension problems in professional texts.

Reading may seem easier than oral communication, because the reader can read the text a number of times, if necessary, and because non-native speakers can translate a written text into their native language, something they don't have an opportunity to do in conversation. However, this is not necessarily true. Reading can be more difficult than listening for both native and non-native speakers. Reading may not provide as much about the situational context as a conversation does.

In face-to-face conversation, for example, the speaker relies on paralinguistic cues like pauses and eye contact.

Another difficulty for reading is that it is one-way communication. If readers do not understand the text, they cannot ask the writer questions.

For instance, there was less confidence among the participants on the topics: read complaints and read web sites. Hence, non-native readers reading authentic English can potentially mis-comprehend or not comprehend due to any of the following factors, listed by Carrell (1984: (68) 332-343):

- 1- The reader might not have an existing schema-that is, might not have the background knowledge that the writer assumes or it might not be sufficiently developed to fully comprehend the text.
- 2- The text may not contain enough cues to allow the non-native reader to understand it (even though it is sufficient for a native reader). The non-native reader may not be able to make use of grammatical or semantic information to choose among the possible interpretations.
- 3- Lastly, the reader may choose an inappropriate schema. Again, non-native readers are less able to make use of grammatical, semantic, and other information that would allow them to choose the appropriate schema.

All receptionists receive tourism manuals in English. On the topic of itineraries, they pointed out that there were package tours, containing detailed and vivid descriptions of places to be visited. However, as I was informed, receptionists do not need to read nor understand tourism related literature, they only ensure their distribution. In any case, they sometimes need to explain package tours into more detail.

PREFERENCES OF PLACE AND TIME FOR TRAINING PROGRAMMES

The majority of the receptionists said that they prefer language training programmes to take place at home in their own time with good materials and or with help from a qualified teacher.

According to Spolsky (1989), preferences of second language learning methodology depends on several factors including: contextual factors, individual learner differences, learning opportunities, language aptitude, learning strategies, learner beliefs, age of the learner, etc...

In this case, large classrooms are perceived as having a great effect on learning and can alter a student's motivation negatively. Perhaps, the respondents of this study have had a negative learning experience such as overcrowded classrooms.

COMMUNICATION BARRIERS

Most of the respondents seem to have understood that the question did not focus on lack of language skills but it looked to find out about other obstacles, which affect communication . According to their responses, cultural differences, in particular, lack of intercultural awareness plays a significant role in the communication between them and some guest's . for example, as they reported , people from different backgrounds have various approaches to cultural differences and or conflict management.

Basically, all cultures have internal variations and it is impossible to know their varied systems. What is logical and important in a particular culture may seem irrational and unimportant to another. On the other side of the scale, differences between cultures are often emphasised and experienced as threatening while similarities are ignored. Thus, we cannot doubt that cultural differences exist and that lack of awareness of it can lead to misunderstandings.

However, it is not quite clear whether communication barriers are more of a language problem than a pure cultural problem. Information is misunderstood due to the use of inappropriate language or lack of clarity, even different accent can also be an obstacle.

Other communication barriers include pressure of time and poor listening. Too many times we are so concerned about what we want to say that we don't hear what the other person is really saying. Also, responding to someone without first considering their point of view can be hazardous.

CHAPTER 6

CONTRIBUTIONS FOR COURSE CONTENT

Comment [CA1]: ter title?

As I have had the opportunity to explain, up until recently, ESP instruction concentrated on training special lexicon and translating different functional texts. Of course, such methods did not reflect students' interests and could result in low learner motivation and less success. With the spread of the student-centred approach and the continued increase in international contacts in various spheres, much attention has been paid to the design of ESP courses that can prepare students for professional communication.

Consequently, I am interested in suggesting an English course specific to work-related needs and objectives of receptionists, usually adults who have studied general English in school but who need to develop proficiency in either a specific skill area such as writing or in a specialised content area such as handling complaints. My suggestions are based on indications my informants provided me with and on the specific linguistic needs that I have perceived the future professionals will require.

CORE COMPETENCIES IN AN ESP COURSE FOR RECEPTIONISTS

The results of the needs analysis can help the ESP teacher to understand the receptionist's specific training requirements with various levels of detail: course design, discipline design and materials design (the exact level of detail required depends upon the professional community involved and on the students' needs). With respect to course design, a general structure should be developed which indicates what disciplines will be offered, their objectives and their contents.

Before further considerations, the process of teaching English to a group of receptionists has to take into account:

- 1- the variable nature of their professional context. That includes changes in circumstances such as busy times of the day, high seasons (i.e. summer, Christmas), dealing with different cultures and accents, angry guests, stress, etc...
- 2- the increasing demands both of the employment market and of changing professional requirements, that involve versatility in using technical means and specific Tourism Board norms. For instance, there are times when receptionists have to learn English while adapting to technological improvements. There are specific computer programmes that receptionists have to use and many of them are in English.
- 3- the contact with different cultures results in the need to understand different accents and deal with uncommon culturally generated situations.
- 4- the cultural differences involved, the demanding negotiating roles that receptionists encounter and the transfer of soft skills into a language that is not one's own.

In addition to these factors, there are some other important aspects related to the teaching of English to receptionists. Language cannot be separated from a number of fundamental social, cultural and psychological aspects among which are the following:

- 1- Identity- whether or not the Portuguese receptionists will identify with the English language positively will affect their effort to use and learn it. The teachers should consider the receptionist's motivation and attitudes towards English, which in turn seem to depend to a certain extent on the need to speak it. That is,

“If learners need to speak the second language in a wide range of social situations or to fulfil professional ambitions, they will perceive the communication value of the second language and will therefore be motivated to acquire proficiency in it” (Gardner, 1985:102).

Motivation can be integrative (for personal growth and cultural enrichment) or instrumental (for more immediate or practical goals) and these types are related to success in learning English (Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert, 1972).

- 2- Learning experiences related to English. Put simply, the receptionists attitudes towards English may well be the result of previous learning experiences or even the type of contact they have had with English speakers. So, the emotional reaction to the learning experience is an essential aspect.
- 3- Purpose and motivation to study English - the purpose of English in their professional lives and the perceived interest that learning it will have in their professional promotion. On the other hand, if the learner's only reason for learning the second language is external pressure, internal motivation may be minimal and general attitudes towards learning may be negative. Attitudes may influence how seriously the individual strives to acquire the language.
- 4- Values within which expectations and anticipations of the future are formulated – social standing and integration,
- 5- Finally, the will of the individual to optimise his/her potential in the process of achieving success. We must take into account that these factors (identity or motivation) are difficult to interpret and measure.

This information will help teachers to respond to some of the problems they may come across in designing an English course for receptionists, and outline a series of teaching strategies that cater for learners' needs more effectively.

Even before considering the linguistic requirements the ESP teacher has to possess, in order to teach ESP for receptionists, there are fundamental needs that the teacher has to take into account. These are an awareness of the local culture, work practices and routines, policies concerning the services offered to guests, and national and international affairs, generally speaking, knowledge of the requirements of communicative situations within the community.

Only when there is awareness and first hand experience of both the community and community specific texts can effective teaching/learning take place. Hence, in order for the English for receptionists' course to achieve optimal success, there must be a greater understanding of the hotel receptionist's work on the part of the ESP teacher.

FORMULATION OF GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE

Formulating goals and objectives for a English for receptionists course allows the teacher to create a clear picture of what the course is going to be about. As K. Graves explains, 'goals are general statements of the final destination, the level students will need to achieve' Graves (1996). Strategies are the ways of achieving the goals. Clear understanding of goals and objectives and the choice of appropriate strategies will help teachers to select the material to use, and to manage when and how it should be taught. In his book D. Nunan (1988) gives a clear description of how one should state objectives. According to what receptionists require, objectives may sound like the following:

- Students will learn to handle conflict and offensive language in English.
- Students will be aware of and attend to intercultural differences and will respond to them adequately in English.
- Students should be able to possess essential writing skills in order to use the fundamental genres needed at the reception confidently.

It is important to state realistic and achievable goals and objectives and to state the contexts in which language should be used for the specific purpose of receptionist communication.

Much of the receptionists' success or failure depends on communication skills, including how well they can perform in English. Not only is it important to use English confidently for the various tasks such as writing e-mails and answering the telephone, it is equally important to use the necessary soft skills in English. These soft skills are vital in any profession where public relations and emotional management is required, but are of particular importance at the hotel's reception. This can be a challenging task for the Portuguese receptionists as they need to exhibit a variety of soft skills not only in

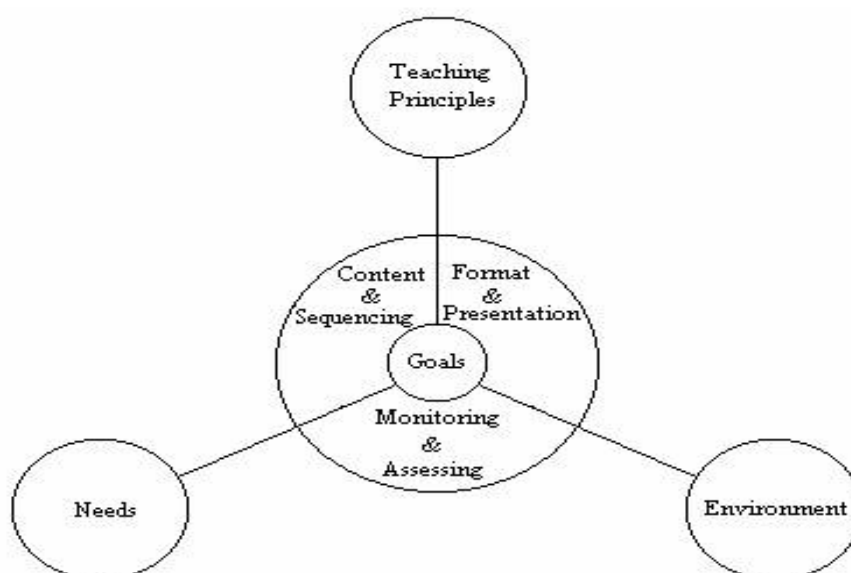
Portuguese but also in English. That is also a challenge for the teacher of ESP. He/she has to encourage and teach the receptionists how to apply soft skills confidently in English in the various situations that require problem solving and this is to be done despite their linguistic constraints and the tourism business's requirements. The following are some of the **soft skills** that receptionists must acquire:

- 1- Communication skills: this does not just entail speaking English or being able to write an e-mail to a guest without any spelling mistakes. Instead, receptionists must develop communication skills that involve the ability to present ideas to guests (i.e. make suggestions about places to visit or food).
- 2- Problem solving ability: Receptionists are constantly faced with new challenges. For example, they need to handle orally presented complaints and solve problems relating to the hotel. Receptionists need to be able to solve problems quickly and efficiently in order to keep the guests satisfied. Creativity and assertiveness are often key qualities that receptionists must have/develop in English.
- 3- Handling conflict: Receptionists will occasionally need to put their foot down and be assertive. Sometimes, they need to convince the guests that there are rules to be followed and that they need to perform their duties in accordance to regulations at work. It is just as important, however, to know when to give in and maintain an honest relationship with guests, employers and co-workers.
- 4- Customer service orientation: receptionists very often deal with guests who are regular or permanent guests. These are very dependent on the receptionists for many situations. They are foreign tourists or businessmen who need orientation from the day they arrive in the hotel to the day they check out, from the moment they get up until they go to bed. Put simply, they need constant attention and help. The receptionist must be capable of providing that help and mobilising his/her English competency for the job.

- 5- Teamwork: Portuguese receptionists are members of a community. They sometimes need to deal with tourism entities in English (e.g. travel agents). These entities expect receptionists to co-operate with them although they may have vested interests in very different fields and may compete amongst themselves for the same business. The receptionist will have to mediate and find ways of managing these sometimes conflicting interests in a way that will benefit their employers without causing hostility. Thus, team skills must be a necessary part of Portuguese tourism culture. After formulating major objectives and choosing teaching materials, the teachers must start planning the course.

COURSE PLANNING

It may be useful to follow a systematic approach based on a model of course design and described in detail by P. Nation (2000):



By P. Nation (2000) Designing and improving a Language Course. "English Teaching Forum2, 38 (4).

The inner circle represents the syllabus. The outer circles (principles, environment, needs) represent practical and theoretical considerations that will guide the process of course production.

TEACHING PRINCIPLES AND METHODOLOGY

Teaching principles include the core competences and skills of the teachers, the results of the need analysis carried out in the professional community and the fundamental principles of teaching and learning. ESP is not just about finding the right course content, it is also about finding the best way to teach for specific needs. Thus, methodology is also of crucial importance. Since ESP courses aim to develop linguistic skills relating to particular spheres of activity, not only the *nature* of the linguistic items introduced, but the *ways* in which they are introduced and *how* they are practised, are highly significant.

Teachers should encourage an open atmosphere in the classroom to make participation possible and negotiations central. It is also essential for the teacher to explore alternatives with the students about their learning programme. The method of teaching should always consider the receptionists' preferences and follow what takes place at the hotel's front desk therefore contributing to the learner's confidence and success. It seems nonetheless difficult to determine which method is the most appropriate.

THE RECEPTIONISTS' ANALYSIS

In planning the course, it should be remembered that a lot of the input for each class session can be provided by the students themselves. For instance, they can give mini-presentations on their work experience.

Whatever preparation the teacher has done before the course starts, the linguistic needs of receptionists cannot be outlined in great detail until they arrive. The exact professional skills of the class and the amount of English they have studied are not known in advance.

Receptionists can give us information about their current level of English and what English is used at work, motivation, methods of learning they have experienced and what they want to achieve. Accordingly, their current English plus the English they need/want to achieve is known as the *i + 1 Hypothesis*. S. Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985). According to this theory, in the teaching of English to receptionists, the teacher, will start from students' current stage and bring them to the second stage of their needs.

There may be different ways of finding more information about receptionists' needs and previous experience. It can be done through group discussions, individual talks, etc. For example, students may be asked to explain how they deal with situations such as dealing with angry guests, making public announcements, writing reports, dealing with foreign accents, translating and what problems they encounter. Also, imagine you are a guest who will be speaking English to a non-native English-speaking receptionist, and then observe situations and discourse that may involve communication problems. If a hotel keeps guests' comment cards or a complaints register, reviewing these can also inform us of problems that might be resolved in ESP training sessions.

In the first class the students can be asked to write down their expectations, needs, and wants to hand in to the teacher. They should be encouraged to voice their opinions on this matter at any time during the course. If, for example, after a short exercise on pronunciation, certain students feel that they need to do more work on the pronunciation of 'tourism' terminology, this can be incorporated into the course; or the students having this need can be given material to work on by themselves or in a self-study lab. If they feel that they have particular difficulty understanding English speakers with unfamiliar accents, they can be provided with additional listening comprehension material and be given extra help in understanding what they hear.

Even though very important, the receptionists' data should not be overused. Finding out this information does not mean that teachers should teach only what their students want. Of course, teaching cannot take place in isolation. There are certain things, such as curriculum, institutional guidelines, and standardisation, that cannot and may not be ignored.

However, in developing a new course, students' analysis will help teachers in formulating goals and objectives, conceptualising the content of the course, selecting teaching materials, and course assessment.

The list of the linguistic lacks, wants and necessities of the Portuguese receptionists, which I have had the opportunity to question, is endless. This list of linguistic needs includes the target needs, learning and present situation needs. The latter consists of their present knowledge and knowledge gaps. On the one hand, the ESP teacher must consider the requirements imposed on receptionists by their superiors. On the other hand, the teacher must distinguish what the receptionists need from what they want/wish to achieve. For example, most of my informants wish to speak English fluently. However, that can be difficult to achieve during a short-term course. Thus, the teacher has to create a prioritisation guideline in order to concentrate on the most needed skills. For example, most receptionists speak English, but there are instances when their English skills seem to be limited or inappropriately used. They lack the necessary language and essential soft skills to deal with offensive language or making public announcements as well as writing skills needed for taking messages, writing complaints and reports. Finally, the teacher must analyse with precision what the students know in order to find out what they lack. That is, to pick up the student at the existing level and to connect new learning items into the network of existing knowledge.

On the other hand, as McDonough (1984:38) points out, even with a group that is completely homogeneous in its learning goals, there will not necessarily be homogeneity of wants, demands, and attitudes to learning. Even when a course is tailored as far as possible to the students' individual requirements, some compromises have to be made. These can, however, work to the students' advantage. Students can be happy to improve their language skills by working with other people whose level of English may be different from theirs, but whose interest in communicating in English is the same.

ENVIRONMENT

The environment that surrounds receptionists and the tourism community must also be taken into consideration as well as the resources available including time. If such factors are not considered, the course may be unsuited to the situation and learners and may be ineffective or inefficient in encouraging learning.

The classroom conditions and learning environment can affect motivation and success in second language learning positively or negatively. According to our respondents' preferences, the number of students in an English class for receptionists should be limited to about ten students.

Other aspects to be considered before designing a course include:

- The amount of time available for the course
- The range of proficiency among the students
- The immediate needs of the learners
- The lack or availability of appropriate materials
- The learners' use of the first language in the classroom
- The need for the learners to take more responsibility for their learning

THE COURSE CONTENT AND SEQUENCING

Identifying and selecting the content for an ESP course for receptionists is not a context-free process. While taking into account information about the students, goals and objectives, now we are in a position to determine which aspects will be included, emphasised, integrated, and used as a core of the course to address receptionists' needs and expectations.

The content of ESP course for receptionists' should consist of the language items, textual genres, skills, and tasks that will prepare the receptionists to work efficiently and confidently in their professional community.

Teachers can focus on developing communicative competence, intercultural competence, vocabulary genre awareness, etc. According to the results of this study, one of the main obstacles, which limits communication between receptionists and the guests is intercultural misunderstanding. For instance, one of the goals of a future course and methodology for receptionists is to achieve intercultural communicative competence and a

good understanding of different accents. Students can develop language skills, but accomplished through the integration of the socio-cultural component into the teaching of the various elements of the language.

Yet, students, in this case, receptionists are different and with the rapid development of the professional world, changes in students needs and interests are inevitable. Therefore, ideally, in establishing a learner-centred approach there should be a frequent adjustment in pedagogy and in the selection of the contents of the course. This shift should match the learners' interests and needs and the community's perceived needs.

It should also become clear that even though separated into the various language learning contents and strategies, all skills and aspects of the language are interwoven in real communication. Therefore, they should be treated, taught, and tested as one inseparable unit.

The ultimate aim of the course will be to acquire and use language to perform specific goals appropriately, efficiently, and effectively within the tourism area.

THE SPECIAL VARIETY OF ENGLISH FOR RECEPTIONISTS

It is perfectly rational for teachers preparing to teach English for receptionists to use reference dictionaries and word books on related areas. However, lexis is just a single level of linguistic analysis and not necessarily the most useful one. English for the hotel reception involves a lot more than special vocabulary, it needs to go beyond words and phrases into the communicative situations and the attendant genres.

The best starting point for teaching English to receptionists is to consider the function of the specific language variety. We must bear in mind why particular vocabulary, collocations and texts are being used.

Receptionists might know the English words for almost every term relevant to their roles already, their word-level vocabulary might not be lacking, yet what they need from teachers is to teach them how to fit the words together and to use their English in context. Besides, soft skills are also to be practised. These are of great importance, especially in situations like dealing with offensive language, complaints and having to make public announcements.

After reading a number of books on English for hotel catering and reception staff, I have realised and found that most of that literature available is limited, especially when it comes to the teaching of situational competencies and soft skills, which are of great importance for this profession. In general, the existing materials, which aim to teach English to receptionists tend to present word lists as well as expression/phrases that receptionists can rote-learn in order to perform the different tasks at work. For instance, the topic 'handling complains' normally presents the language necessary to apologise and take action such as: 'I am really sorry sir, I'll call maintenance right away'.

Although those phrases are useful and reflect the real situations, which receptionists encounter, there are other situations that are equally important, but that the existing books/materials on the market have not yet considered. For instance, all the literature which I have read has failed to address sensitive situations such as: dealing with conflict or even offensive language. These are situations, which according to Portuguese receptionists are particularly difficult to handle in English. The competency, which addresses soft skills goes beyond the simple application of fixed words or phrases of apology or explanation. It bears upon the fundamental exercising of communicational manner, this is to say, if a receptionists does not feel confident in her/his linguistic competence, it will be doubly demanding to mobilise the appropriate language and manner to respond to the communication need.

SUMMARY

As I have had the opportunity to discuss earlier, any ESP course for hotel receptionists must be student-centred. That is, it must relate to the receptionists' needs and objectives. The course must also take into account their professional context, requirements, cultural differences and their attitudes and motivation towards English. Thus, the ESP teacher must understand the hotel receptionists' work well in order to formulate achievable goals and objectives. According to what Portuguese receptionists require, it is important to use English confidently for the various tasks such as answering the telephone and dealing with complaints. Because the ESP course for receptionists is provided to students who are already working as professionals, the syllabus should be 'receptionist-centred', selected,

tailor-made and presented. It is equally important to use soft skills in English such as problem solving ability, customer service orientation, team work, etc...

It should be remembered that the linguistic needs of receptionists can only be outlined in great detail when the teaching process is in action. That is, in the first class, they can give us information about their needs, expectations and wants and classroom learning should try to harmonise with the expectations of our students.

Finally, it is recommendable to start from the students' previous knowledge and experiences, after this has been refreshed and updated. Then, the teacher must connect new learning items with what the students know (their existing knowledge), while taking into consideration the learning environment, the professional requirements of receptionists, the resources and the amount of time available.

The communicative skills should be developed by using the foreign language as teaching language. The use of special authentic materials like complaint forms, bookings can improve the reading comprehension and writing as well as intensifying the relationship with their professional context.

CHAPTER 7

MATERIALS

There are many factors to be taken into account when evaluating material to be used with receptionists, since the choice of materials determines the content of the course. According to Nunan:

"Materials are, in fact, an essential element within the curriculum, and do more than simply lubricate the wheels of learning. At their best they provide concrete models of desirable classroom practice, they act as curriculum models, and at their very best they fulfil a teacher development role. Good materials also provide models for teachers to follow in developing their own materials." Nunan (1988:21):

Receptionists should be familiar with the textual genres of their profession and therefore have a reasonable knowledge of materials and these must be chosen according to their language level, interests and language/learning needs identified during the needs analysis. Potentially there is nothing wrong with re-using old/same teaching materials, if everything is relevant and suitable to receptionist's needed and desirable language related skills. The same article or audio can be used for developing reading or listening comprehension skills, cultural awareness, expanding vocabulary, etc. Thus, as K. Graves points out, teaching materials are

"tools that can be figuratively cut up into component pieces and then rearranged to suite the needs, abilities, and interests of the students in the course (Graves K., 1996: 27).

THE EXISTING MATERIALS

It should be understood that there are some good textbooks in the fields of ESP, but they are few and far between. The scope of existing materials, is often not fully suitable for the needs of Portuguese receptionists as textbooks are too broad-based and general and tend to want to cover areas in the business domain superficially.

Existing materials value reading, writing, speaking and listening skills and present specific linguistic items. These, however are not enough and it means that they may not be very helpful to a particular group of Portuguese receptionists. That is, there are important aspects that need to be taught to receptionists and are not covered.

For instance, existing materials do not include advice with regards to soft skills and intercultural communication needs. Further, materials contain little guidance in the management of complaints, i.e., they do not consider the fact that complaints can be presented by an angry guest, or by someone with unclear pronunciation. Despite the fact that materials have significant problems and have to be critically assessed, Wild says:

"...one cannot deny the usefulness of coursebooks and the materials they contain. They have usually entailed an enormous amount of expertise, time and effort to produce, and the material is extensively researched and trialled before being published." Wild (1991:78).

Thus, it is important that the teacher knows when and how to use a book, as Williams says:

"The textbook is a tool and the teacher must know not only how to use it but, how useful it can be, the textbook will continue to play an important role, but it will not be a tyrant." Williams (1983:64)."

Before the course starts, the English teacher should collect as much potential teaching material as possible from the work place, in this case, the hotel's reception.

Also, even if s/he does not intend to use a specific textbook for the course, it is worth seeing what is on the market. There are no specific books particularly on English for receptionists, but there is a large number of course books in English for tourism and/or English for the hotel staff. Teachers can also consult ESP materials such as those found in Master and Brinton's volume (1998), which provides suggestions for a variety of workplace settings, and then carefully select material to fit the needs of receptionists.

Contrary to usual practice, the teacher of an ESP course for receptionists cannot use English speaking country materials for the speciality of Portuguese needs.

Using the Internet has also become an increasingly useful tool. With one million pages of information added every day, the Internet is indispensable to any ESP teacher looking for teaching materials. But these too, there must be particular care taking to localise content and adapt to the specific needs of Portuguese receptionists.

In sum, the teacher can choose to :

- 1- select appropriate parts of existing, published practice materials.
- 2- collect original material from the receptionists' workplace or
- 3- specifically design material for receptionists. These may be of higher quality than published materials as they reflect real communicative situations and are valid for assimilation and discussion. Such activities enable receptionists to learn appropriate language in contexts which are job related and stimulating.

Whatever materials we collect from the hotels' receptions can be reused in new situations and refreshed whenever necessary.

Customising materials for each group of receptionists also makes the learning process easier, as they relate to materials about their own profession and work environment.

As Clarke points out: "External or imposed materials can be made internal to the learners by creative involvement in the adaptation process" Clarke (1989:12).

To help make the material meaningful, we may use the receptionists' names in the dialogues, the hotel's name and hotel-specific situations, and the names of managers or others involved with the tourism business.

In other words, receptionists may become more committed to materials they have helped to create. In practice, teachers may use a combination of commercially produced and original materials. When trying to evaluate the materials available, perhaps the best advice is, as Nation points: Think first "What am I trying to teach?" Then, "Is this the best way to teach it? " Nation (1992:36)

AUTHENTICITY IN MATERIALS

Recently, the use of authentic materials has become increasingly popular in learning situations, specially in language training for professionals. Authentic materials, should be appropriately selected and implemented. These can be used to develop tasks and provide a bridge between the linguistic skills of receptionists and their professional knowledge goals.

A number of authentic materials must be collected before and during a course. The first step in identifying appropriate materials is to gather samples of professional writing, reading, and other training materials from the receptionists' place(s) of work. The possible materials to be collected from a hotel's reception include:

- registration and departure forms, including guest's comments
- e-mails and faxes written in English from and to guests or tourism related entities
- complaint letters/forms
- examples of basic report writing
- travel guides and magazines can be a good source of topics and can provide valuable background reading for both the teacher and receptionists.
- a large map of the region as well as time tables of transports, so that receptionists can learn the names of parts of country and services available in English.

The careful adaptation of authentic material for teaching purposes does not entail the loss of authenticity. In fact, it might ensure a greater applicability to the local needs and uses of the receptionist. Although some may argue that the materials are no longer authentic, I put forward that what is really positive in the use of these materials is a totally relevant and applicable form.

AUDIO MATERIAL

Teachers can tape record communicative situations such as:

- the experienced and fluent receptionist, welcoming the guests and showing them the hotel's facilities
- various telephone conversations
- the guest's requests, including requests for directions
- complaints
- public announcements, etc...

According to my experience, receptionists are often willing to co-operate and these recordings can provide a good source of listening comprehension material. Recorded dialogues, discussions and even conflicts with guests can be heard in the classroom and in group the receptionists may evaluate the performance of their peers. Hence, it would be very useful to record various conversations among members of different countries and cultural backgrounds. Those recorded tapes can be very useful tools for practicing listening of the different accents heard in the Portuguese hotels.

These exchanges could be filmed, if possible, so that a good observation of body language would help them improve their non-verbal communication skills. Those recordings would provide the classroom with valid information about their first contact with the guest.

The materials can be used in whole or in part, and complexity can be reduced or increased according to the goals of receptionists. The material must contain terminology, concepts, and linguistic complexity that reflects the receptionists' required background knowledge.

Additionally, the material needs to contain linguistic elements applicable to the general aims of the training, employers and the receptionists' individual goals and practical skill-building requirements. The more relevant the material is to the trainees' professional activities, the more effective the training becomes.

SELECTION

In selecting the right materials, the teacher needs to consider at least three basic aspects of the receptionists' backgrounds:

1. linguistic background, which influences classroom performance, the selection, the sequencing and execution of tasks, and the focus of instruction.
2. knowledge background, which determines the need for specificity or generality of information in the particular.
2. Cultural background, which affects classroom interactions, and expectations

The following are additional factors that influence the decision of what materials to incorporate into specific language tasks:

- *Applicability*- the receptionists' current career goals will affect the range of applicability of the material. Generally, the content of the material is more easily understood and processed by receptionists when it is closely related to their professional reality. However correct material may seem, it will be unacceptable to receptionists if it does not match their own goals.
- *Adaptability* refers to the ease of task design and ease of text manipulation. If the material can be incorporated into both oral and written communication tasks, its adaptability makes it more suitable for classroom use than material that can be applied to only one task.

- The material should be learner-centered and facilitate interactive learning

Material used should empower students and put them in control of their own learning.

Littlewood makes the criticism that:

"It is all too easy for foreign language classrooms to create inhibitions and anxiety. It is not uncommon to find a teaching situation where the learners remain constantly aware of their own state of ignorance before a teacher who possesses all relevant knowledge."

Littlewood (1981: 25)

Therefore, material should be presented in such a way that it is possible for the student to be self monitoring and both questions and answers should be available.

Material should make it easy to divide the class into groups or pairs, to have conversations or roleplay, and to allow the students to interact with each other, so they can learn from each other as they do from the teacher and they can simulate communicative situations.

- Material should be socio-culturally appropriate and gender-sensitive

It is easy to be insensitive in the area of cultural differences. It is important to respect cultural, sexual and language differences and to avoid potentially offensive images or jokes, which rely on racial stereotypes and material where women are consistently portrayed as subordinate.

Marilyn Lewis comments:

"There is no such thing as culture-free language. The question is not whether culture should be a component of a language course but, rather, what cultural messages are there without the teacher's being aware of them?" Marilyn Lewis (1991:90).

Sheldon tells us we should ask: "Does the coursebook enshrine stereotyped, inaccurate, condescending or offensive images of gender?" Sheldon (1988:12)

- The material should be up-to-date, interesting and visually attractive

Although some older material can still be very useful, more recent material is usually preferable since much progress has been made in the teaching of ESP in recent years. Students usually react more favourably to bright, colourful, interesting, well-illustrated material.

- Vocabulary should be comprehensible

It is essential that material matches the abilities of the student.

Material suitable for an advanced student will be beyond the beginner's comprehension and vice versa - material suitable for a beginner will lack challenge for an advanced student.

Material must well-organised and well-indexed. Different components (e.g. books, tapes, videos) must be easy to use in conjunction with each other. If there are different books (e.g. teacher's edition, student's books, workbook) it must be clear how they relate to each other.

- The material should be age-appropriate and relevant

"Is it pitched at the right level of maturity?" Sheldon (1988). Materials for adults need to have adults as the main characters, and to use "mature" language.

As Nunan puts it: "As the focus will be on assisting learners to do in class what they will need to be able to do outside, materials should reflect the outside world. In other words, they should have a degree of authenticity." Nunan (1988:61)

TEACHING METHODOLOGY

The teacher can encourage the receptionists to perform role simulations, when they share their own experience with their peers. This would include rehearsing, reformulations and corrections.

A possible approach is to ask the class to do role simulations in which they have to apply their soft skills, including problem-solving skills to the situation.

This implies that the course should help receptionists build confidence to carry on a general conversation with guests, besides teaching them specific terms and phrases for work (e.g. language for giving directions).

Learning materials should focus on specific problems that receptionists are likely to encounter in their everyday working lives in the ESP field. For instance, to develop fluency in telephoning, a teacher should present real telephone conversations between the receptionists and the guests.

Within the context that learning materials should be authentic and content-based, many important linguistic items relevant to English for receptionists may be introduced and practised. Examples of linguistic items include: 'room service, vacancies, arrivals, departures, towels, etc...)

The result of this methodology is that learning has greater relevance to the hotel's reception situation. In turn, this means that receptionists will have greater interest in the course and may learn faster.

With respect to the degree of linguistic complexity of skills introduced and practised, specific linguistic items are mastered in small scale activities. For example, a

range of linguistic functions connected with greeting guests: introducing oneself, directing them to the room, telling them where to sit or eat, asking them if they would like a drink or other item.

Real social/professional interactions at the reception must be observed in order that the receptionists may see what precise phrases people use to perform the various functions in the hotel and then there must be opportunity to practise in an authentic context. Such contexts are useful for introducing and practising specific linguistic items.

We must decide whether a language-learning program for receptionists should be defined in structures, speech acts, functions, themes, lexis, skills, tasks, activities, teaching strategies or in varying combinations of these. Further, Whichever way we choose, it can never be objectively established as the best choice among a set of different possibilities.

One of the core dilemmas is that:

"ESP teachers find themselves in a situation where they are expected to produce a course that exactly matches the needs of a group of learners, but are expected to do so with no, or very limited, preparation time" (Johns, 1990, 91).

Familiarising oneself with instructional materials is part of a teacher's work, regardless of the nature of purpose for learning. Given that ESP is an approach and not a subject to be taught, curricular materials will inevitably be pieced together, some collected from the reception and others designed specially for a group of receptionists. Resources will include authentic materials, ESP materials, and teacher-generated materials.

WHAT A COURSE SHOULD CONTAIN

- Course objectives to help clarify what the course is trying to achieve. The aims of a course for receptionists are to make a course that achieves its goals, and does this in an efficient way. Having a clear statement of goals is important for determining the

content of the course and receptionists can also benefit from being told about the goals.

- Contents, which provide the logical plan for the course such as linguistic and non-linguistic items (structures, vocabulary, body language, etc...)
- Schedule
- Teachers' notes with relevant information about the receptionists' job and opinions.
- Practice materials.
- Placement and progress tests.

EVALUATING THE COURSE

Course evaluation is the last, but not the least, important stage. Teachers should evaluate their courses to improve and promote their effectiveness. Evaluation can be done in two different ways:

- 1- Implicitly, where evaluation takes place during the semester, when learners, by their grades, participation, and motivation, give clues to the teacher on how their learning is going on and
- 2- Explicitly, which may take place at the end of the course or after students have experienced it. Using questionnaires, surveys, talks, etc. teachers ask the receptionists to express their opinions towards the subject matter, instructional methods, activities, teacher's role and so on.

Assessment generally involves the use of tests. An important distinction in testing is between:

- 1- Proficiency tests, which measure what a learner knows of the language. Proficiency tests may be used to measure a learner's level of language knowledge before entering a course and after a course is completed and
- 2- Achievement tests, which measure what has been learned from a particular course. Achievement tests are closely related to a course, and the items in the tests are based on the content and learning goals of the course. Evaluation of the course is a brave step for the teacher. He should be open-minded in hearing and implementing learners' comments.

CONCLUSIONS

Before the course starts and in order to help improve communication in the reception, teachers must be well informed of the workplace culture, the vocational needs of receptionists, and the constant changes that are taking place.

The course must be designed for all receptionists irrespective of their mixed abilities and include selected topics that meet their needs.

The goals of the ESP course for receptionists are to be clearly formulated to them and these and the teacher's goals should fit together and supplement each other. To improve communication at work, receptionists will need to engage in more conversational activities, giving personal reactions to something heard, read, or viewed in a variety of different pronunciation patterns and situational contexts.

For instance, communicative practice in simulated everyday situations, developing listening and oral fluency skills, reading comprehension of reception-related materials, writing effective e-mails and letters, socialising in English, making telephone calls. It is important to make the receptionists aware of their own cultural background and introducing general topics of culture and communication. In order to increase receptionists' knowledge cultural differences, they are made familiar with concepts such as beliefs, values, and norms. Furthermore, an overview of topics such as stereotypes, communication

barriers, different perception, verbal communication, non-verbal communication, and context can be included.

During the course, however, some materials have to be adjusted to the changing wishes of the receptionists. Developing a new course is not just planning a course.

Teachers are constant learners and with professional experience their views, teaching concepts, and methodological knowledge are continuously changing. From year to year, they have different students with different needs and background. That will inevitably make it necessary and important to modify every course and adjust it to a particular group of students. Furthermore, quite often in the classroom things take place in an unexpected or unplanned way. Flexible teachers are open to making necessary changes while teaching. They can see what can or should be modified, added, or changed to make the course reflect students' interests and needs. Therefore, course development can be seen as an on-going process.

Selective Glossary

Authentic materials – real and genuine materials and not a copy

Communication skill – ability to express ideas and feelings give information

Course design – arrangement of different parts of a course

Genre – a particular type or style of literature that you can recognize because of its special features

Learner-centered – concentrating on the person who is learning

Linguistics – a scientific study of language of particular languages

Methodology – set of methods and principles used to perform a particular activity

Needs – situation when something is necessary or must be done

Questionnaire – written list of questions that are answered by a number of people so that information can be collected from the answers

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APPENDIX A

Este questionário tem como objectivo analisar as necessidades comunicativas dos recepcionistas Portugueses em Inglês. Os resultados obtidos serão anónimos e farão parte de um projecto de mestrado.

Idade: _____

Profissão: _____

Desde de: _____

Sexo: _____

Língua materna: _____

1- Onde é que aprendeu Inglês?

Em casa

No trabalho

Na escola

Na universidade

No estrangeiro

Outro _____

2- Como é que prefere aprender Inglês?

Sozinho com um professor

Num grupo pequeno com professor

Num grupo grande com professor

Sozinho, usando bons materiais

Outro _____

3- Quando é que fala Inglês?

Nunca

Raramente

Poucas vezes por semana

Todos os dias

Muito frequentemente

4- Indique todas as situações em que tem que usar/falar Inglês? Qual é o grau de confiança que tem com cada uma destas tarefas numa escala de 1 a 4 (1= muito pouco confiante e 4= confiança total)

Quando recebe o cliente	1	2	3	4
Obtêm os dados pessoais do cliente	1	2	3	4
Dá informações sobre o hotel, lugares turísticos, serviços...	1	2	3	4
Traduz informação relacionada com os serviços prestados (custos de transportes, alimentação, horários...)	1	2	3	4
Responde a perguntas relacionadas com a cultura Portuguesa (alimentação, entretenimento, clima...)	1	2	3	4
Responde a outras perguntas	1	2	3	4
Ouve os pedidos do cliente	1	2	3	4
Ouve mensagens	1	2	3	4
Pergunta se o cliente está satisfeito	1	2	3	4
Ouve as opiniões do cliente sobre o hotel e a região	1	2	3	4
Recebe ilugios	1	2	3	4
Em conversas não relacionadas com o hotel/turismo (política, futebol, religião, humor, etc.)	1	2	3	4
Faz anúncios públicos	1	2	3	4
Ajuda um cliente que adoece	1	2	3	4

Ajuda um cliente deficiente	1	2	3	4
Ajuda o cliente a transportar a bagagem	1	2	3	4
Recebe gorjeta ou prendas do cliente	1	2	3	4
Lida com um conflito no hotel	1	2	3	4
Lida com reclamações oralmente expressas	1	2	3	4
Esclarece mal-entendidos	1	2	3	4
Ouve insultos ou ofensas	1	2	3	4
Dispõe-se do cliente	1	2	3	4
Fala com outra instituição ao telefone	1	2	3	4
Contacta os clientes por telefone	1	2	3	4
Deixar mensagem por telefone	1	2	3	4
Ouve e regista mensagens telefónicas	1	2	3	4
Obtém informações por telefone	1	2	3	4
Dá informações sobre o hotel e a região por telefone	1	2	3	4
Dá outras informações por telefone	1	2	3	4
Responde a perguntas por telefone	1	2	3	4
Recebe informações/ instruções por telefone (sobre a chegada dos clientes e necessidades específicas)	1	2	3	4
Pede esclarecimentos por telefone	1	2	3	4
Esclarece mal-entendidos por telefone	1	2	3	4
Faz marcações por telefone	1	2	3	4
Lida com reclamações ao telefone	1	2	3	4
Lida com linguagem ofensiva	1	2	3	4
Termina a conversa ao telefone	1	2	3	4
Lê cartas	1	2	3	4
Lê reclamações	1	2	3	4
Lê um curriculum vitae e cartas de apresentação	1	2	3	4
Lê publicidade/ panfletos	1	2	3	4
Lê faxes	1	2	3	4

Lê e- mails	1	2	3	4
Lê web sites	1	2	3	4
Lê revistas turísticas	1	2	3	4
Lê guias turísticas	1	2	3	4
Lê mensagens dos clientes	1	2	3	4
Lê documentos pessoais do cliente	1	2	3	4
Lê outros tipos de correspondência	1	2	3	4
Escreve/ alters os dados do cliente	1	2	3	4
Preenche fichas	1	2	3	4
Escreve cartas	1	2	3	4
Escreve postais	1	2	3	4
Escreve relatórios	1	2	3	4
Escreve mensagens	1	2	3	4
Responde a e-mails	1	2	3	4
Cria ou apaga ficheiros	1	2	3	4
Escreve faxes	1	2	3	4
Preencher fichas de reclamação	1	2	3	4
Outra (s)_____	1	2	3	4

5- Quais são os aspectos, não relacionados com a linguagem que geram problemas com a sua comunicação em Inglês?

Atitude do cliente

Diferenças de cultura

Expectativas do cliente

As condições e regras de trabalho

A disponibilidade de tempo

Stress

Outro (s) _____

6- Para além de uma maior competência em Inglês, que outras competências gostaria de obter?

Conhecer melhor outras culturas

Saber lidar com situações conflituosas

Decidir com eficácia

Ser mais assertivo e flexível

Combater o stress

Outra (s) _____

Agradeço muito a sua participação. Os resultados deste questionário serão anónimos e farão parte de um projecto de mestrado.

Fátima Fabião

APPENDIX B

Figure 1: An ELT Family Tree

